

“The Inevitable Pipeline into Exile”

Johann Alexander Müller

*Botswana's Role
in the Namibian Liberation Struggle*



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Johann Müller

Introduction by Reinhart Kössler

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Beyond the Confines of the Nation: Another Dimension of Liberation Politics in Southern Africa. An Introduction

This book forms an important departure in the study of liberation movements in Southern Africa. African independence and liberation movements have customarily been viewed within a national framework. Previously, while the exile of leaders and liberation fighters as well as international diplomacy is certainly documented, little attention has been given to the broader regional setting of the mobilisation and movement of people. Safe havens in neighbouring countries played a vital role in the success of guerrilla strategies.

Little attention has previously been paid to the preconditions of such co-operation and the efforts in organisational work that are a prerequisite for making it effective. Johann Müller's account, originally submitted as a PhD thesis in 2009, represents an important and, in some ways, a pioneering inroad into precisely this field. Müller's study can be read as a contribution towards the relationship of two nation states during their formative periods, despite their grossly divergent trajectories. His description conveys some of the foundations of regional co-operation that today are incorporated into the SADC. As one of Müller's informants puts it, SADC was already, *avant la lettre*, embodied in a figure such as Daniel Munamava, one of the main actors in Müller's account, along with many other prominent Namibians, which include the first and second presidents of independent Namibia. All made their way through the vast and sparsely populated regions of Botswana, adjacent to the Namibian territory towards the East, to reach independent African countries where they could establish themselves in order to wage the liberation struggle from outside their home country.

Müller describes the inevitable subterfuge Namibians entering Botswana employed, e.g. contracting as migrant workers in order to leave the country on a legal pretext. Above all, his story tells of the help and co-operation that Namibians going into exile received outside the country. Herero speakers residing in various parts of Botswana, in particular, extended this help. They were the descendants of refugees from the genocidal campaign of the German colonial *Schutztruppe* in Namibia at the beginning of the 20th century. Significantly, they welcomed the refugees as fellow Namibians regardless of ethnic background and helped them on. At the same time, they felt allegiance to the country of their birth and residence, Botswana. Some of those supporting the refugees played important political roles in Namibia, especially after independence. A further source of support came from Botswana chiefs, in particular the Ngwato. They had received Herero refugees

in 1904 and were instrumental in helping to forestall the incorporation of Namibia into South Africa. This, however, related as well to the contradictory position of the colonial administration of Bechuanaland and, subsequently, the government of independent Botswana. Another of Müller's achievements is that he is able to demonstrate the way in which the incumbent authorities, both during colonial times and after independence, negotiated the difficult task of being virtually surrounded by territories under colonial and apartheid regimes. To some extent they were forced to appease their overwhelmingly powerful neighbour in the south, whilst maintaining a humanitarian and supportive attitude towards the refugees from occupied Namibia.

This 'manipulation of the international system' demonstrates how the dominant realistic view of international relations based on a rather narrow notion of the national interest is countered by a principled, if flexible, stand. Müller's analysis offers a further important perspective on the Namibian liberation struggle. In covering events during the early 1960s, the book deals with the formative phase of the liberation movement. Organisations had not yet crystallised and allegiances were still fairly malleable. It was not quite as clear as may appear in retrospect that SWAPO would emerge as the dominant organisation. At the same time the ways in which this came about underline the importance of the demands set by the OAU for recognition as a *bona fide* liberation organisation. These demands emphasized the need to engage in armed struggle. While their determination, as well as capacity, was clearly instrumental for SWAPO's ascendancy, the failure to comply with and the thwarted attempts to make up for this deficiency were decisive in the ultimate plight of groups such as SWANU or NUDO, whose members found themselves stranded in Botswana, unable to proceed further as they had hoped, and were expected to do, by Botswana authorities. Johann Müller's research focuses on these little-known developments. He has covered a sizable amount of archival material and interviewed scores of actors both in Botswana and Namibia.

This book will serve as a valuable source of new information for many and preserve the precious memories that present and former activists shared with him. The main contribution, though, of this account may arguably be to demonstrate, in considerable detail, an instance of actual trans-national co-operation brought about against heavy odds, and sometimes under considerable risk, well before national independence was attained. May this legacy serve as an inspiration under present circumstances, happily free from the shackles of colonialism and apartheid, to deepen and develop further co-operation for the good of all people in Southern Africa.

Reinhart Kössler, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (Freiburg i.B.), May 2011

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Once the research is completed and exists in a presentable form the researcher is faced with the task of finding the right audience for his work. With regard to my dissertation, I am delighted to publish it with the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB). I can only thank BAB for their great cooperation in preparing this book. Furthermore, my sincere gratitude goes to the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) for supporting the publication. ABI has been a home to me while I was writing the dissertation and I will always remember the institute and all my colleagues there for an extremely fruitful research time.

Writing a dissertation can be both challenging and stressful. The support and encouragement of others therefore becomes especially important. In an environment far from the home country one is reliant on the knowledge of local experts in order not to get lost in what sometimes may appear to be a maze of confusing options. I shall always be grateful to all those men and women who have contributed in so many ways to make this work possible.

I would especially like to thank my parents, Winfried-Gerhard and Elisabeth Müller, for their constant encouragement and support throughout all the stages of my dissertation. My father spent countless hours on proof-reading and making valuable suggestions; my supervisor Prof. Dr. Reinhart Kössler has been of inestimable help with his competent and knowledgeable advice from the time my plans for my dissertation developed up until the very last moment of writing; the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute and its director, Prof. Dr. Heribert Weiland, for the opportunity to work in an enriching research environment with pleasant colleagues and a superb library; the National Archives of Botswana, Namibia and the United Kingdom, especially the Chief Archivist of the Namibian National Archives, Werner Hillebrecht, who has given me valuable inspiration on how to start my work; the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, and, in particular Dr. Dag Henriksen, who was always extremely helpful when my research led me to the Southern Africa Library in Basel, and the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation whose support allowed me to focus on this work full-time and to realise my full research agenda. I should also thank all those men and women I interviewed including those who made these interviews possible, particularly Lemogang Ntime, who additionally introduced me to current politics in Botswana; Lenyeletse Koma, who introduced me to the Herero communities in Botswana and who proved to be a pleasant, patient and knowledgeable adviser; Mburumba Kerina made it possible for me to meet many of the Makunda refugees; Katuutire Kaura spared a day of his busy life in parliament to take me to his brother's farm and, finally, Fidelius Otsile with his specialist knowledge on the Batswana in Namibia and Botswana.

To my parents

Introduction

The focus of academic research on the Namibian liberation struggle has generally been centred on the activities of Namibia's main liberation movement, SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation). This applies to studies that were produced both before and after the Namibian independence. As Christopher Saunders observed in a recent essay,¹ the objective of any such works has hardly changed since SWAPO came to power in 1990. Unsurprisingly, studies on the liberation struggle published during the conflict aimed at convincing the reader that the side writing on the liberation struggle was fighting for a just cause. As the Namibian conflict became increasingly internationalised, both freedom fighters and South Africans made use of work serving propaganda purposes, rather than providing the reader with a detailed and balanced analysis.

Neutral observers faced the challenge of presenting the Namibian struggle objectively. Franz Ansprenger's book on SWAPO, published in 1984,² a time when it was still difficult to obtain information about the actual power relations in the Namibian conflict, highlights this difficulty. In many instances Ansprenger could only guess or make estimates about occurrences in an intensifying guerrilla war. Today questions still remain open, due to the fact that in most cases researchers do not have access to the SWAPO archives. Considering the ongoing, but often purposely suppressed debate on the atrocities committed by SWAPO in Zambia in the 1970s, and particularly in the Lubango dungeons in Angola in the 1980s, it seems unlikely that this situation will change in the near future.

More recent works have sometimes presented a rather one-sided picture of the Namibian liberation struggle. Saunders points out that both Sam Nujoma's (*Where others wavered*) and Oswin Namakulu's (*Armed liberation struggle*) perspectives are much influenced by the effort not to linger too long on mistakes made by SWAPO and its military wing, PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia).³ On the other hand, one must acknowledge some attempts that have been made to come to terms with the Namibian past. In 1995 Siegfried Groth, a former protestant pastor who had been working with SWAPO in exile, published a book on SWAPO's atrocities.⁴ In the same year Colin Leys and John S. Saul alluded to the darker side of the freedom fight by looking at the Namibian libera-

¹ Cf. Saunders 2007: pp. 18 ff.

² Cf. Ansprenger 1984

³ Cf. Saunders 2007: pp. 21 ff.

⁴ Groth 1995

tion struggle as a “two-edged sword”.⁵ More recently, Gustine Hunter’s dissertation addressed the difficulty of dealing with the darker side of the Namibian liberation struggle in the present Namibian society.⁶

I do not, however, intend to draw a picture of the entire Namibian liberation struggle. In 2001 the project of the “Archives of the Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle” (AACRLS) was launched at the National Archives of Namibia. Its aim was to honour all participants in the Namibian liberation struggle and present a more balanced picture of the conflict. This project allows researchers to focus on allegedly minor incidents of the liberation struggle that nevertheless contribute to a broader picture of Namibia’s fight for independence and, by so doing, serves the purpose of looking at occurrences hitherto neglected.

A much neglected focus has been the role played by other African countries in Namibia’s struggle for liberation. This regional dimension to the conflicts in southern Africa should not be overlooked. As early as 2005 the Heads of State and government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) agreed to hold a summit in Botswana to launch a project that aimed to focus on the southern African liberation struggle from a regional perspective.⁷ It is common knowledge that Tanzania and Zambia with their well-known and charismatic leaders, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, did a great deal to support liberation movements all over southern Africa. In some cases (e.g. FRELIMO in Mozambique), they helped to create an organisation capable of confronting the colonial power.⁸ A charismatic leader whose country only received greater international attention in southern Africa’s liberation struggle when it engaged in the Front Line States Movement in the 1970s, was Seretse Khama, President of the Republic of Botswana from 1966 to 1980. When looking at the map of this region it becomes clear that it was virtually impossible for Khama’s country to keep out of the liberation struggle in southern Africa. A land-locked neighbour of Namibia, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), its territory inevitably constituted a base for liberation movements when leaving their homelands for exile or launching military operations. This geographical position placed Botswana in a rather difficult situation. H.C.L. Hermans summed up the situation: “To be land-locked is difficult enough. To be black and land-locked in southern Africa is a lonely and expensive experience.”⁹

⁵ Leys/Saul 1995

⁶ Cf. Hunter 2008

⁷ Cf. <http://www.sardc.net/Editorial/sadctoday/view.asp?vol=436&pubno=v9n3> (15.6.2009)

⁸ Cf. Gibson 1972: p. 276

⁹ Hermans 1973: p. 210

In the case of Namibia the situation was particularly delicate. It was only after the Revolution of the Carnations in 1974 in Portugal led to the breakdown of the Portuguese Empire and thereafter to Angolan independence, that Botswana was no longer the only territory bordering Namibia, which was not ruled by a white minority regime. One might argue that before 1966 even Botswana was ruled by a white elite. The British protectorate of Bechuanaland (established in 1885), Botswana's predecessor, however, had to be considered to be more liberal and far less supportive of apartheid practices when compared to both the Republic of South Africa (to which Namibia from a South African point of view belonged), and Portuguese Angola.

The primary objective of this book is to analyse the role Botswana and the Bechuanaland Protectorate played as a first stage into exile in the Namibian liberation struggle, in particular up to the Revolution of the Carnations. From 1974 the importance of the escape route via Botswana diminished because of the new possibilities created in the north by Angolan independence. My main focus, therefore, falls on the years between the foundation of the Namibian liberation movements in 1959 and 1960, and the year of Angolan independence, 1975. Botswana's role will be of particular interest. Her proximity to and economic dependence on the Republic of South Africa left little political room for manoeuvre. It is thus appropriate to adopt a theoretical approach that looks at the potential for freedom of action in the handling of refugees and national liberation movements and the way this was dealt with. It is clear that Botswana's delicate situation, torn between pan-African sentiments and the compromising factor, proximity to apartheid South Africa, inevitably resulted in a policy of prudent diplomacy.

The book is divided into nine chapters. In this book it is not my aim to dwell on the level of policy-making. The question of room to manoeuvre by the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana was, however, undoubtedly an influential parameter in the handling of refugees and freedom fighters. Chapter 1 will thus look at these parameters. Only once we understand the situation of policy-makers in Gaborone or the Protectorate government, are we able to appreciate the contribution of Namibia's eastern neighbour to advances made during the liberation struggle. Interestingly, when analysing the political freedom that Botswana enjoyed, analysts came to different conclusions, possibly depending on different perceptions of power relations, as well as political developments that led to a shift of power in southern Africa. Before examining these analyses, it will be necessary though to take a closer look at previous accounts of Botswana's involvement in the Namibian liberation struggle.

Long before the actual struggle against South African occupation began, population movement from Namibia to Bechuanaland was taking place. After the Germans estab-

lished their protectorate in South West Africa, as Namibia was then called, the first group of Ovaherero¹⁰ fled eastwards across the border. This occurred again in 1896 after the Mbanderu War and, more especially, after the Herero–German War in 1904. The exodus led to a growing community of Ovaherero in Bechuanaland with even a few Nama reaching the other side of the border. Chapter 2 closes with an overview of the Herero networks already established in Bechuanaland in the late 19th and the early 20th century in order to evaluate their role at the time Namibians left their country in the late 1950s, the 1960s and early 1970s.

After a brief survey of the methodological approach in chapter 3, the following chapter examines the legal basis on which Namibian refugees and freedom fighters in both Bechuanaland and Botswana were dealt with and the attitude of the respective governments in Botswana. This includes an account of the relationship of the British authorities and later the government in Gaborone, with international partners and, in particular, with neighbouring countries, the OAU and the newly formed UN Council for Namibia. One neighbour that deserves special attention is South Africa. As potential constraints to Botswana's freedom are widely ascribed to South African leverage, the objective of chapter 4 is to look at signs of intimidation from Pretoria, as well as at cases of violation of Botswana or Bechuanaland territory.

The main focus of this book (chapters 5 to 8) describes the role of people and organisations in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana. As mentioned above, there are Herero communities in Botswana, primarily the descendants of victims of the 1904 Herero–German War in South West Africa, whose role during the Namibian liberation struggle will be looked at in depth. I examine in some detail the political parties that were initially formed in Botswana in the early 1960s, and analyse to what extent these contributed to the support of the Namibian liberation movements. In order to get a complete overview of the various organisations and institutions involved in the refugee traffic, it is worthwhile taking a brief look at the welfare organisations supporting the daily struggle of the refugees. This aspect has previously been comprehensively dealt with by Matlou and, partly, by Zetterqvist.¹¹

During the course of my research it became apparent that the activities of the Namibian liberation movements in Botswana have been manifold and diverse. In the initial years of the liberation struggle both SWAPO and SWANU (South West Africa National Union) could not have survived without making use of the territory of Botswana. Chapters 6 and 7 examine the activities of these two liberation movements as well as their

¹⁰ The root of the word is “Herero”, the plural is “Ovaherero”.

¹¹ Cf. Matlou 1992: pp. 104 ff. and Zetterqvist 1990: pp. 35–36

organisational structure. Taking into account the fairly important role Botswana unwillingly played in the formation of NUDO (National Unity Democratic Organization), which was brought about by the Herero Chief's Council, the move of 154 Ovaherero to Bechuanaland in 1964 is considered in chapter 8. This chapter serves as a case study highlighting the approach to the influx of refugees and the underlying tactics of Protectorate and Republican officials. Finally, the last chapter looks at the impact of Botswana on the Namibian liberation struggle as a whole. This can be done most effectively by comparing the behaviour of authorities in Bechuanaland and Botswana with possible action alternatives and their potential consequences, thus placing this research into the broader context of developments in southern Africa. In this regard, one must point to a research project of the Uppsala-based Nordic Africa Institute on "Liberation and Democracy in Southern Africa", which aims at examining the "relationship between liberation (in the sense of decolonization) and social transformation"¹² in southern Africa.

This book aims to expose the importance of the territory of Botswana and its people for Namibians going into exile. This perspective has been neglected in past research. Instances in which vital contributions to the Namibian liberation struggle have been made are described and emphasis is placed on the need of the Namibian liberation movements to take into account undertakings of fellow party members in Botswana. There is no doubt that it is difficult to precisely quantify this level of support. Yet, an account of events in the territory of Namibia's eastern neighbour during the time of the struggle seems to be of great relevance for the overall examination of the liberation struggle. This approach leads to the conclusion that the treatment received by Namibian refugees and freedom fighters at the hands of its eastern neighbour was far more effective than other options might have suggested initially. Secondly, the topic of this book contributes to closing a relevant research gap and complements a number of research projects that mainly deal with the role of Namibia's northern neighbour, Angola.

¹² Melber 2003: p. 150

1 Research Overview and Theoretical Framework

When reading through literature on the liberation struggle in southern Africa, one inevitably comes across various political activists and freedom fighters that used the territory of Bechuanaland or Botswana either as a permanent base of exile or (mostly) as a transit station on the way to other independent African countries. This applies in the Namibian case as well. The information given about these getaways is usually confined to a short mention. Further detailed information about the exodus is infrequently provided. A rare exception is the case of Kenneth Abrahams whose story has been told in great detail.¹ Another example is that of Helao Shityuwete who elaborated on his escape through Bechuanaland in his personal account on the Namibian liberation struggle.²

Current Research. An overview

Analysts of Bechuanaland and Botswana politics usually only mention the government's handling of political refugees in order to illustrate the difficulties political leaders were facing both domestically and abroad. These analyses give a rather general glance at refugee policies, which does not focus on refugees from Namibia in particular. In these works it appears that the interaction of British officials in the protectorate and that of Botswana officials did not differ substantially. For both, the power of their South African neighbour had to be taken into account. As it was "impractical to police" borders,³ the territory was forced to suffer South African "border raids and hot pursuits."⁴ Richard Dale mentions that the refugees created "considerable economic, security and social problems".⁵ Nevertheless, it was agreed both under the British and under Seretse Khama's BDP government that temporary asylum to *bona fide* refugees should be granted.⁶ This policy is often mentioned in order to emphasise the tolerance of the independent Botswana government; it also served the purpose of keeping its distance from South African policies.

In her essay on political refugees in Botswana, Katrin Sell emphasises Botswana's long tradition of receiving refugees. She refers to the exiled people from the Difaqane Wars in the first half of the 19th century, as well as to the Nama and Herero refugees that we shall

¹ Cf. e.g. Leys/Brown 2001: pp. 139–157

² Cf. Shityuwete 1990: pp. 81–90

³ Halpern 1965: p. 326

⁴ Barber/Barratt 1990: p. 74

⁵ Dale 1985: p. 220

⁶ Cf. Stevens 1967: p. 153

focus on later. Sell stresses the importance of Botswana's territory as a destination and transit station for refugees from Namibia, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia both before and after independence. The allegedly liberal handling of refugees by colonial officers in the protectorate considerably affected British–South African relations.⁷

Despite this alleged openness it seemed to have been clear from the beginning that Botswana was not to be used as a base for military operations into neighbouring territories.⁸ This does not mean that Seretse Khama and his government completely disapproved of violence. The government's policy was more a consequence of Khama's general strategy given in his inaugural speech, in which he emphasised that Botswana's foreign policy would have to be "dictated by reason and commonsense."⁹ Accordingly, James Polhelmus argues that out of the three options generally available to enforce foreign policy objectives (rational persuasion, sanctions and violence) only the first one could realistically have been considered by Botswana's policy makers.¹⁰

The question of armed resistance and military struggle was a crucial one in the Namibian liberation struggle. The strict refusal of violence organised from Botswana's territory, mentioned throughout the accounts on Botswana, provide an interesting facet, which I examine in some detail below.

Roger Southall explains that the British stressed the temporary status of the refugees, arguing that they were reluctant to grant the refugees authority to remain.¹¹ Jack Halpern even points out that the British made "strenuous efforts" to limit the refugees' activities in the Bechuanaland Protectorate¹² thus foreshadowing the implications that their presence would have on domestic politics in newly independent Botswana. All relevant works refer to the fact that the vast majority of refugees did not opt to remain in Botswana. There is only the occasional mention of political debate about the refugee issue among political parties in Botswana. In fact Richard Stevens points out that the refugees, particularly those from South Africa where the ANC (African National Congress) and PAC (Pan-African Congress) were already organising an armed struggle, were an influential factor at the time that political parties were being formed in the early 1960s in Bechuanaland. He writes that refugees served as a "catalyst in the development of modern Botswana nationalism."¹³ Nothing is said, however, about Namibian participation in any such process.

⁷ Cf. Sell 1989: pp. 357–360

⁸ Cf. Claus 1992: p. 154

⁹ Republic of Botswana 1966: p. 11

¹⁰ Cf. Polhelmus 1985: pp. 248 ff.

¹¹ Cf. Southall 1984: pp. 151–179

¹² Halpern 1965: p. 328

¹³ Stevens 1967: p. 141

The continuing presence of some refugees did, in any case, alienate political leaders in Botswana from time to time. Seretse Khama's biographers Henderson, Parsons and Tlou allude to the great suspicion the refugees aroused when mixing with the political opposition. One might assume that this was the reason that led the government to introduce a harsh refugee act in 1967, which had to be revised later because it did not comply with the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.¹⁴ The suspicion that was aroused appears to be somewhat justified. Polhelmus hints at regular statements from the opposition party, BNF (Botswana National Front), concerning the treatment of refugees, which constantly criticised the government's handling of the issue.¹⁵ All this underlines the importance of examining the consequences of the presence and transit of refugees for domestic politics in Botswana.

Jack Halpern notes that traditional leaders were sceptical about the presence of refugees from southern African neighbouring countries. There were concerns among chiefs and headmen that some of the refugees were more educated than themselves.¹⁶ Chiefs and headmen in Bechuanaland had only, if at all, received very basic education. Whether traditional leaders were challenged in this way is arguable, yet difficult to tell at this stage. In order to avoid any conflict, the British had taken the precaution of ruling that refugees should abstain from politics in the Bechuanaland Protectorate.¹⁷

Former Botswana President, Quett Masire, included a brief chapter in his autobiography on Botswana's interaction with the liberation movements. He emphasised the general policies of his government (further described below) and paid special attention to Botswana's relations with the South African ANC. Co-operation with Namibian liberation movements is, however, only touched on marginally.¹⁸

An approach informing much of my work is that of Peter Matlou. In his dissertation he argues that Botswana's refugee policy is regarded as tolerant and liberal merely because of the large numbers of refugees that had been received in the country. Looking at the quality of the granted aid and the refugees' level of integration, however, Matlou asserts that Botswana's refugee policy had been restrictive to a large degree. From his point of view, it was the costs (that would have been necessary for adequate treatment of refugees), the inadequate financial support from donor countries and Botswana's security situation that accounted for this lack of commitment in what he calls "micro issues". Nevertheless, he does emphasise the importance of Botswana's role in the liberation struggle

¹⁴ Cf. Dale 1995: p. 37

¹⁵ Cf. Polhelmus 1985: pp. 237–238

¹⁶ Cf. Halpern 1965: p. 460

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*: p. 327

¹⁸ Cf. Masire 2006: pp. 265–273

in southern Africa. His dissertation alludes to the important role that international and non-governmental refugee agencies played in handling the refugee problem and deals extensively with the Dukwe settlement in eastern Botswana, which was primarily meant to house Zimbabwean refugees.

Although Matlou's study gives the reader a good overview of Botswana's refugee policy, there is little detailed information on the Namibian liberation struggle. As there is a clear focus on the years after 1975, the period of the Namibian conflict, my research covers those aspects, previously only touched on, for example very little has been written about any support given to the liberation movements. Yet, Matlou's study helps us to understand the constraints under which Botswana could get involved in Namibia's struggle for independence. Like many other commentators, as will be shown later, he stresses the significance of Botswana's proximity to and economic dependence on South Africa. Matlou mentions that during the last years of the Bechuanaland Protectorate there was close co-operation between British officials and South Africa, and points out that the South African Police were moving about freely in the protectorate.¹⁹ Above all, Matlou's insights justify the adoption of a further examination of Botswana's room for manoeuvre as a theoretical framework.

This short outline reveals that refugees and refugee policies have been an issue in both the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana. There is, however, a lack of any kind of precise information concerning the impact the country, its people, its government and its territory had on the Namibian liberation struggle. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the interaction of officials with political refugees both in Bechuanaland and in Botswana has to be examined in light of a constant South African political and economic hegemony that ultimately results in the question of Botswana's degree of political freedom and the policies derived from it.

Room for manoeuvre? A theoretical framework

In order to comprehend the operations of the Namibian liberation movements and refugees on the territory of Botswana, the aim of this book is to identify the patterns and strategies, policies and guidelines of Bechuanaland's and Botswana's interaction with the Namibian liberation movements. As South African hegemony substantially influenced the policy making of British and Botswana officials alike, we are bound, initially, to examine this determining factor in order to reach a better understanding of the extensive measures taken in the respective administrative capitals, Mafikeng and Gaborone, that

¹⁹ Cf. Matlou 1992: p. 59

evolved during the course of the Namibian liberation struggle. The following analysis will help us to evaluate Botswana's contribution from a more enlightened angle. It should be clear, however, what is meant by hegemony. Bieler and Morton define "hegemony" in neo-realistic terms as dominance or supremacy of a state, which is based on its economic and military capacity²⁰, and thereby illustrate the perception of "hegemony" as a category mainly influenced by issues of "high politics". This definition seems to be appropriate for this case as, indeed, these are the factors that a South African hegemony was based on. There is no doubt that the economic and military balance was strongly in favour of South Africa in the bilateral relations with Botswana. Chapter 2 will elaborate on this.

From many analyses of international politics we learn that policy making is not solely a matter of argument within national governments and parliaments, but rather a complex process open to influence by both internal and external factors. If we examine the handling of the refugee influx in Botswana, we shall have to assume that there were certain principles that guided officials in charge in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and, thereafter, in Botswana. Any such underlying principles will ultimately have an impact on the adoption of policies dealing with the refugee issue. Regardless of who was involved in this policy-making process, it seems to be essential to identify the determinants of the potential support that could be given to the liberation struggle in neighbouring countries and to the various liberation movements. Admittedly it would be naïve to take for granted that the interaction with refugees always had a legal basis. As we have indicated earlier, the Herero networks, in the sparsely populated Ghanzi District in western Botswana as well as in Ngamiland and some places along the railway line in eastern Botswana, have played a fairly influential role in aiding the freedom fighters. In a country almost as large as France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg combined, and which was only populated by about half a million people at the time, it seems apparent that there will be occurrences of which the government, or any other public institution, takes no notice. In fact, the possibility of interference by Bechuanaland's or Botswana's authorities without solid legal basis should not be ruled out. Osei-Hwedie points to the fact that there was a considerable difference between the actual legislation and the interventions of Botswana's authorities when dealing with the refugees.²¹

Determinants for the degree of support

While it appears to be most useful to concentrate on the room for manoeuvre Botswana possessed due to political and economic dominance of South Africa in the region,

²⁰ Cf. Bieler/Morton 2006: pp. 353–380

²¹ Cf. Osei-Hwedie 1998: pp. 425–439



Fig. 1: New leaders in Southern Africa: President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia on a state visit to Gaborone with Botswana's president Sir Seretse Khama, August 1968

a glimpse at determinants from within the country is appropriate. Vincent Khapoya examined the support given by African states to the struggle for independence in southern Africa. He came up with a list of five criteria accountable for the degree of assistance a liberation movement received from a certain African government.²² *Firstly*, the physical distance between the government's territory and the territory to be liberated is decisive. As both Zambia and Tanzania were reasonably close to southern African countries with white minority regimes, it

comes as no surprise that Kaunda and Nyerere were deeply engaged in the liberation struggle. Botswana was situated even closer to Namibia, thus making close cooperation with the Namibian liberation movements seem logical.

Secondly, cultural closeness matters. In this respect it is language that is very important. In fact, African French speaking countries have been far less enthusiastic in supporting the liberation movements in mainly English speaking southern Africa. Consequently this would be another argument for substantial assistance from Botswana. This can, however, not be said of the *third* criterion, ideological proximity. Although it is difficult to attribute to SWAPO or SWANU a true Marxist position, there was no doubt about their affiliation to the Soviet Union and/or China, mainly due to the financial and military support given to them.²³ As opposed to this, Seretse Khama always tried to maintain a policy of non-affiliation towards either side during the Cold War.

Fourthly, one should not underestimate the perception of nationalism. Khapoya distinguishes between two kinds of nationalism being addressed in African countries and attributes stronger assistance in the liberation struggle to "combative" nationalism. "Combative nationalism exhibits a readiness to engage directly in the struggle for patriotic aims and objectives"²⁴ and therefore the dedication to the liberation struggle seems to

²² Working Documents 1981: pp. 16 ff.

²³ Cf. Dreyer 1994: 56–58

²⁴ Working Documents 1981: p. 18

be greater in countries where “combative nationalism” is practised. “Supportive” nationalism, found in countries such as the Ivory Coast, leads rather to a hesitant stand being taken by the respective governments towards the fight for independence. Considering Seretse Khama’s reconciling rhetoric and his fundamental strategy of non-interference, it can be concluded that nationalism in Botswana is rather a “supportive” one. In terms of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, a Batswana²⁵ nationalism only developed in the 1960s at a time when it was not the Batswana themselves who were in charge of policy making. Nationalism can be understood in this case as “primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent”.²⁶

Finally, emphasis is put on the personal factor. Khapoya asserts that a head of state such as Uganda’s Idi Amin was very impulsive and therefore supportive of the idea of liberating southern Africa, whereas Felix Houphouët-Boigny, President of the Ivory Coast, was by nature a “voice of moderation” and therefore rather hesitant to give unlimited assistance to the liberation movements. He was in fact to become one of the most important addressees of the South African dialogue policy. The British protectorate of Bechuanaland undoubtedly lacked any influential leader comparable to Amin or Houphouët-Boigny, yet Botswana’s first President, Seretse Khama, became a well-respected figure in African politics. By the time he started his first term he had certainly lost some of his “rebellious” character that had led him to a marriage with Ruth Williams, a white British clerk, against the wishes of his uncle and then Regent of the Bangwato,²⁷ Tshekedi Khama. One can therefore assume that Seretse’s handling of the refugee issue was mature and not necessarily guided by impulsive reactions as in the case of other African statesmen.

These criteria certainly contain some truth, but, as stated above, they neglect outside factors. As was the case with Botswana, being caught up in a southern African sub-system of states under South African hegemony, these outside factors played a crucial part. They resulted in a delicate situation for Botswana that needs to be looked at in more depth. It is important to acknowledge that this brief overview of Khapoya’s five factors is by no means a detailed analysis of the conditions that the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana were facing domestically when dealing with the refugee issue. Rather, these criteria are used to frame further analyses of these areas of study.

Olajide Aluko’s analysis of the determinants of the foreign policy of African states acts as a bridge to the geographical situation. Admittedly, the entire involvement of Botswana

²⁵ The term “Batswana” is not to be confused with the country “Botswana”. The root of the word is “Tswana”, a single person would be a “Motswana”; “Batswana” therefore is the plural.

²⁶ Gellner 1983: p. 1

²⁷ Literature on the Batswana generally differentiates between eight major tribes. Among them the Bangwato are the largest. Cf. Ramsay 1987: p. 65

in Namibia's liberation struggle does not fall into the category of foreign policy. The handling of the refugee issue can certainly be regarded as part of domestic politics. However, the overlapping of domestic and foreign issues cannot be denied,²⁸ especially in the African context and, secondly, the attitude towards the liberation struggle in southern Africa is undoubtedly a matter of foreign policy making. The underlying basis of such policies is, of course, always the question of the kind of relationship a state aims for with another state, in this case South Africa. Aluko emphasises the importance of both internal and external factors African states have to take into account when determining their foreign policy.²⁹ He cautions against the unreserved acceptance of the rhetoric of African heads of state; the actual implementation of policies could differ substantially from these. Aluko calls this the difference between "declaratory and operational aspects".³⁰ Whether this really is an African phenomenon is open to question. One can accept that the main objectives of African heads of state when determining their foreign policies refer to domestic issues: "Unity, stability, independence and economic development".³¹ Surely if we look at the uncertainties that surrounded the existence of Botswana as an autonomous entity during the years before her independence, we can hardly doubt that stability and independence were crucial objectives of any policy making in Gaborone. Aluko places special emphasis on the role of the African head of state. This might, *per se*, imply a dictatorial or autocratic leadership. While this cannot be said about Botswana, in Africa the field of foreign policy making is widely considered as a "special preserve of the President",³² and Botswana is no exception in this case.

Criteria for a well-founded analysis

The handling of the Namibian liberation struggle in both the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana has to be analysed in light of the political room for manoeuvre due to South African efforts to gain political leverage in her surrounding territories. If outside factors did not play any role one could immediately enter into an analysis of the refugee policies of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana as well as the occurrences on Botswana's territory during the Namibian liberation struggle. This would, however, not adequately cover the situation. After all, in a final analysis (chapter 9) an appreciation of what the protectorate and Botswana made of their "delicate" position will only

²⁸ For further insights on the interconnectedness of foreign and domestic politics see: *Rosenau: Linkage Politics* (1969).

²⁹ Cf. Aluko 1977: p. 2

³⁰ *Ibid.*: p. 1

³¹ *Ibid.*: p. 2

³² *Ibid.*: p. 6



Map 1: Namibia and Botswana in southern Africa

be possible by considering these outside factors. As we shall now come to realise virtually all commentators on Bechuanaland and Botswana politics have highlighted the South African dominance in the regional sub-system of southern Africa. While analysts have come to the conclusion that in the 1980s a relaxation of Botswana's dependency on South Africa can be observed, the focus of this book is on the years in which the influx of Namibians into Botswana was at its most intense. We therefore look at analyses concerned with the period between the late 1950s and the Portuguese Revolution in 1974.

It was among the Ovaherero and the Nama where first calls for independence could be heard in Namibia. With the help of the Anglican Reverend Michael Scott, the Ovaherero

sent petitions to the United Nations.³³ These were motions that signalled the beginning of nationalistic thinking in Namibia. Further developments led to the creation of SWANU and SWAPO. These gathered momentum with the exodus of many leading figures of these organisations, mostly via Bechuanaland.³⁴ As stated initially, the importance of the territory of Botswana only declined in 1974 when the Revolution of the Carnations opened the way to the north. It was in that year that large groups of the SWAPO Youth League and leading members of SWAPO's internal wing left Namibia via Angola – an occurrence which is of no great relevance for this book but which was going to lead to one of the most severe crises within SWAPO.³⁵

Needless to say that during this period the line-up of states in southern Africa did not remain static. On the contrary this was subject to frequent changes mainly due to the achievement of independence of the various states in the region. In our case, we shall have to distinguish between the period before Botswana's independence and the setting thereafter. Before, however, a brief survey of political and economic factors in the relationship between Botswana and South Africa, a strong cause of limited political freedom, will be carried out.

Bechuanaland and Botswana's dependency on South Africa has been largely attributed to economic and geopolitical factors, which will be looked at in depth in the second chapter. No one would question these economic and geopolitical facts, especially when they appear as clear-cut as in the relationship between Botswana and her southern neighbour.

As implied in previous accounts, there is the underlying assumption that this economic and geopolitical dependence left political leaders in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana with little room for manoeuvre. Reginald Green phrased it accordingly: "A state whose economy is characterised by concentrated external dependence can hope to have neither a significant degree of control over the rate of growth and nature of allocation of domestic resources nor a high level of external credibility from which to bargain."³⁶ This view, however, reflects a very one-sided approach to international politics and the understanding of the determinants of policy options. Just as we have to oppose the exclusiveness of Khapoya's principles, we also have to state that some further investigation will be necessary in order to envisage the effects of Botswana's dependency on South Africa. Various studies make clear the difficulty of precisely ascribing certain policy measures taken by British officials in the protectorate or by Botswana officials to South African political leverage or pressure. After all, the objective of all political leaders

³³ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 275

³⁴ Cf. Ansprenger 1984: pp. 73 ff.

³⁵ Cf. Harneit-Sievers 1985: pp. 56 ff.

³⁶ Green 1970: p. 273

of South Africa's northern neighbour would be to ensure that its status of sovereignty appears as wide-ranging as possible and, therefore, a confession of powerlessness would have been unlikely. (Although Botswana actually did refer to her powerlessness occasionally, mainly for strategic reasons when it was, for example, faced with allegations of allowing South African or Rhodesian incursions into the country.)

Nevertheless, the basis on which some commentators have made statements on Bechuanaland and Botswana's policy options needs further clarification. Initially it has been suggested that there are two main factors that influence the assessment of Botswana's political room for manoeuvre. Firstly, one has to observe the time at which Botswana's political freedom was evaluated. Needless to say that at the time the exodus from Namibia into Bechuanaland started in the late 1950s, analysts more frequently came to the conclusion that South African dominance in the region was overwhelming. At that time not a single country in southern Africa was ruled by a black majority government. Under these circumstances, any political leader sympathetic towards the goals of the liberation movements would have been fairly isolated. Only after Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were granted independence (as Zambia and Malawi) in 1964 did the "wind of change"³⁷ affect southern Africa. The independence of the British High Commission Territories, alongside with Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, in 1966 and 1968 respectively, was another positive factor for change, although this did not automatically alter the situation of economic dependence on South Africa. The Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Southern Rhodesia, however, was a major setback for both newly independent African states and liberation movements as it strengthened South Africa's position in the region. Apart from political factors, economic developments led to a shift of power. Most noticeably the discovery of the first diamonds in Botswana in 1967³⁸ initiated a process of greater sovereign development for Botswana's economy.

A second and potentially even more crucial factor in many analyses is the perception of the functioning of international relations. Stefano Guzzini points to the fact that "political thought is influenced by the historical context in which it is formulated."³⁹ The prevailing understanding of international strategies at the time of emergence of Namibian nationalism was shaped by pure political realism,⁴⁰ not yet influenced by the new methodological approach proposed by representatives of scientism in the 1960s.

³⁷ Low 1988: p. 48. The term "wind of change" was used by British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan during his address to the South African Parliament in Cape Town in early February 1960 when he spoke about the ongoing process of decolonization in Africa.

³⁸ Cf. Dale 1995: xxxii

³⁹ Guzzini 1998: p. 15

⁴⁰ Hans Morgenthau is considered as the founder of political realism. For further understanding see Morgenthau's *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (1946).

Contrary to the ideas of political idealists, realists assume that human nature is both good and bad and therefore not necessarily open to rational argument. The nation state, comprised of human beings and regarded as the fundamental actor in international politics, strives for power as a means to reduce its feelings of insecurity. In this fight for power, force was considered as a legitimate means to enforce political objectives. South Africa, being in a very dominant position in the region, could have asserted her will by means of military threat or even actual invasions. Besides, the realistic concept that did not consider any other institution besides the nation state a major source of power, left South Africa with much room for manoeuvre. A further principle that guided political realists was the principle of hierarchy of political issues. Among political realists it is widely assumed that a primacy of “high politics” can be taken for granted. While “low politics” refers to social and economic issues, “high politics” deal with military and security issues and, as there was no doubt about the compelling character of South Africa’s dominance in the area of southern Africa, the assumption of realist principles led to the conclusion that Bechuanaland and Botswana’s political room for manoeuvre was extremely limited. In terms of the issue of “high politics” it can be added that Botswana did not command an army until 1977. Only when border raids by Rhodesian security forces intensified, did Seretse Khama decide to establish the Botswana Defence Force (BDF).⁴¹ In short, emphasis is placed on the categories of power and interests of nation states. Critics, however, argue that this is not an adequate view of international relations as it adopts a one-sided and therefore not “realistic” ideology.

In neo-realistic terms David Vital argues that small states should apply an active strategy that is characterised by the attempt to reduce discrepancy in strength and by the effort to increase the resources of the state. Admittedly, a small state like Botswana would have very limited opportunities in this respect.⁴² This strategy, however, is expressed by Seretse Khama who emphasised that the aim of Botswana’s policy should be to “convert the almost total dependence of the colonial period to a dignified pattern of interdependence.”⁴³

In contrast to the concept of political realism, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye introduced their concept of complex interdependence, which can be described as an idealistic and partly neo-institutional approach using a positivist methodology. This concept seems to be particularly important for an alternative approach to Botswana’s policy options. Keohane and Nye deny that the use of force can still be regarded as legitimate.

⁴¹ Cf. Weimer 1981: p. 51

⁴² Cf. Vital 1967: p. 121

⁴³ Magubane 1983: p. 361

They further doubt that there is an inflexible dominance of issues related to national security and defence strategies. By arguing that new categories such as moral values have to be taken into account, Keohane and Nye resist the notion that the outcome of political conflicts among states is a direct consequence of the actual power of the contestants. They allude to the fact that transnational and supranational organisations play their part in international politics as well. The influence of the single nation state would therefore diminish. Consequently, they arrive at the conclusion that in those cases in which interaction reciprocally induces costs, one cannot detect a relationship of total dependence among states, but rather a “complex interdependence”. This interdependence is in many instances not a relationship between equals, but it is acknowledged that the inferior partner might also have some room to bargain with.⁴⁴

This room to bargain substantially depends on the categories “sensitivity” and “vulnerability”. If we look at a relationship between two countries, “A” and “B”, “sensitivity” would refer to the short-term effects that “B” would suffer from were “A” to make a change in its policies concerning “B”. Over time, “B” might be able to mitigate the effects of the policy changes made by “A” by introducing alternative policy measures. In this case its vulnerability would be low. The vulnerability would remain high if “B” had either no or a very uncertain possibility to react to changes introduced by “A”. It is, therefore, the dimension of vulnerability that is the determining factor of the asymmetrical value of an interdependence relationship between states.⁴⁵ In our case it is clear that due to the asymmetrical character of the interdependence, Botswana would be country “B” as it was more affected by policy changes of country “A” (South Africa), than vice versa.

This outline aims to present the wide range of views an analysis of Bechuanaland and Botswana’s room for manoeuvre might take. These approaches range between assuming a total hegemony of the Republic of South Africa, which does not leave Botswana with any political freedom, and an asymmetrical interdependence whose value is determined by the dimensions of sensitivity and vulnerability.

About the concept of sovereignty

It has already become apparent that the great deficiencies of Botswana’s economy have been considered a major obstacle to political freedom. Moreover, analysing the situation of the nation state in Africa shortly after most African countries had become independent, Oskar Splett argued that “in economic relations these one-time branches of a non-African mother country [i.e. the newly independent African states] [...] lack any

⁴⁴ Cf. Keohane/Nye 1977: p. 11

⁴⁵ Cf. Ibid.: pp. 12–19

effective sovereignty.”⁴⁶ Although Splett came to this assessment two years before Botswana’s independence, we should try to understand what is meant by “sovereignty” in terms of how far African states lacked the features of a sovereign state and what possible consequences this would have had for Botswana when dealing with the liberation movements in her territory.

By applying the framework of those scholars who distinguished positive freedom from negative freedom, Robert H. Jackson distinguishes between two categories of sovereignty: positive sovereignty and negative sovereignty. While he looks at “negative sovereignty” as the “freedom of outside interference”,⁴⁷ we should focus on “positive sovereignty”. An elaboration on “negative sovereignty” would simply lead us back to the question regarding limited political freedom due to outside influences, i.e. South Africa’s dominance in the region in Botswana’s case. Positive sovereignty can be considered as the potential of the state to execute leadership and to grant its citizens basic material and non-material goods. In this way the people can benefit from the state as an independent country.⁴⁸ Decolonization would otherwise be seen as nothing more than the “formal activity to transfer negative sovereignty”.⁴⁹

Scholars frequently emphasised that the new African states were only juridically independent, not empirically. No intense analysis is necessary to identify the state of Botswana as being more stable than other African states, even during the early years of independence. Many characteristics frequently applied to those states considered as lacking internal sovereignty do not fit the Botswana case. Migdal, for example, points to missing “predominance of the state in large areas of the country” or “ineffectiveness of leadership” because of the “nature of the societies they [i.e. the government institutions] have confronted.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless Botswana does, in her formative years, encounter problems that are concerned with lack of positive sovereignty.

It ought to be self-evident that the independence of a country should provide its citizens with some tangible results. In practice this means *inter alia* that, in order to gain legitimization, a state should be able to guarantee a certain amount of welfare and security.⁵¹ Due to the lack of institutional features, however, this might not be the case in many African states. Deficiencies “in power to protect human rights”⁵² have been recognised

⁴⁶ Splett 1964: p. 5

⁴⁷ Jackson 1990: p. 27. Jackson is in fact not the only analyst adopting the approach of positive and negative freedom. Isaiah Berlin did so before him. See Berlin 1969: chapter 3.

⁴⁸ Cf. Jackson 1990: p. 29

⁴⁹ Ibid.: p. 97

⁵⁰ Migdal 1988: p. 33

⁵¹ Cf. Melhor 1989: p. 32

⁵² Jackson 1990: p. 21

as a crucial problem. Consequently, many African states – and this time Botswana is no exception – had to rely on support in several vital areas, including humanitarian relief and refugee assistance.⁵³ Such a need for help of course makes any country vulnerable and more sensitive to outside influences. From this angle, therefore, it becomes instructive to consider Botswana's treatment of the freedom fighters. We will have to ask to what extent Botswana managed to provide the Namibian refugees with basic facilities and thereby live up to the expectation of a sovereign state.

Validity of approaches of International Relations Theory

However, the analysis of international relations would still not reflect reality by simply following either the assumptions of realists, or the adherents of a scientific explanation of an interdependence relationship. While power relations and degrees of sensitivity and vulnerability provide a good indication of the constellation of a particular conflict, there seems to be a grey area that is not covered by any approach in international relations. It has, in the past, become obvious that on many occasions the outcome of a certain conflict could not be explained by conventional theories. This does not imply that conventional factors did not matter, but is rather an indication that additional factors are involved, which were previously neglected by theorists of international relations.

In order to address this lack attempts have recently been made to engage with Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action in international relations. Scholars of international relations make use of the theory to explain how co-operation among states is made possible by means of verbal communication.⁵⁴ It has been suggested that the power of negotiating has been underestimated and that rational argument can act as a counterbalance against states supposedly superior in leverage and power. Harald Müller argues that in international negotiation turning points and behaviour modification cannot always be ascribed to particular incentives and intimidations related to the established power constellation. One could therefore assume that besides bargaining on the basis of interest and power, reasoning plays a substantial role in international relations.⁵⁵

Proving this assertion would require further empirical studies and even then the role of communication would seem fairly vague. My aim is not either to verify or falsify the assumption that communicative action can be a crucial factor in international relations. Bringing these observations to the fore rather serves the purpose of sensitising the analyst to the limits of international relations theory and that, in the case of the relations between

⁵³ Cf. *Ibid.*: p. 25

⁵⁴ Cf. Niesen/Herborth 2007

⁵⁵ Cf. Müller 2007: pp. 199 ff.

Botswana and South Africa, additional factors previously neglected by scholars of international relations, will have to be looked at as well. On the other hand, Vincent Khapoya cautions against the overvaluation of communicative acts. He argues that when analysing African foreign policy many scholars simply accepted whatever was declared as foreign policy objectives by the respective African heads of state or government representatives.⁵⁶

Other critics of conventional theories of international relations such as Benno Teschke promote new mechanisms for the assessment of international relations. Teschke argues that an “asynchronous comparative perspective” will be necessary to determine the structures of conflict and co-operation in an international context. He postulates the adoption of a dynamic concept that focuses on the transformation of states and structures in order to identify new explanations for occurrences in international relations. Teschke asserts that international relations theories have to be reassessed and refined by reinterpreting the development and the dynamics of the European state system between the 8th and the 18th century. He refers to the tendency that within the last two decades principles of the geopolitical regime were questioned due to the ongoing transformation of the structure of the international system.⁵⁷

There is some doubt to what extent International Relations Theory can be applied to the African context at all. The focus of this discipline has been on what is commonly termed the “western world” and therefore some critics attribute a Eurocentric bias to analysts in this area. According to Dunn this leads to a “marginalization of Africa”.⁵⁸ Assis Malaquias argues that it is not only states, but also liberation and rebel movements that should be taken into account as players in International Relations, for example, the international standing of the Angolan rebel movement UNITA during the civil war before the first elections in 1992.⁵⁹ This certainly is a worthwhile argument for my own analysis, as the activities of the Namibian liberation movements SWAPO and SWANU will be looked at in depth and their impact on international negotiations briefly considered. John Clark asserts that in many African states there is no such thing as a national interest, because policies would simply follow the interest of the ruler. Therefore he argues that one of the important variables of International Relations Theory loses its relevance.⁶⁰ However, as always with generalisations, these do not fit every case and, although Botswana was certainly ruled by a very charismatic leader from independence, there is no doubt that Seretse Khama had Botswana’s national interest in mind when introducing new policies.

⁵⁶ Cf. Khapoya 1974–75: p. 25

⁵⁷ Teschke 2007: pp. 17 ff.

⁵⁸ Dunn 2001: p. 3

⁵⁹ Cf. Malaquias 2001: pp. 12–21

⁶⁰ Cf. Clark 2001: pp. 99 ff.

Furthermore, the South African side had to be taken into account. Applying conventional theories of International Relations we assume that it was South Africa's position as a hegemon that strongly influenced decision-making in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana. There is no doubt that, especially in apartheid times, Pretoria possessed a foreign policy regime closer to western states than to what was being practised on the African continent. Therefore there is some justification for looking at Botswana's treatment of the Namibian freedom fighters and refugees through the eyes of conventional International Relations Theory.

Looking at conventional approaches with regard to Botswana during the period between the end of the 1950s and 1974/75, it should be acknowledged that the tendencies of globalization were not as visible as they are today. Traditional (i.e. realist) approaches can be considered as more applicable at that time. Still, it is important not to follow the findings of either realists or adherents of a complex interdependence theory as if they were dogmas. A critical approach will be necessary to evaluate the measures taken by officials in Bechuanaland and Botswana in the international context. As indicated above, Keohane's and Nye's analysis of a complex interdependence relationship provides a solid basis for such an evaluation; this approach has been adopted by other scholars writing on Botswana as well.⁶¹

⁶¹ Cf. Claus 1992: p. 24 and Dale 1985: p. 209

2 Historical Basis

Botswana

With regard to Botswana, this chapter has its main focus on the degree of political freedom of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana. It is thus a continuation of the theoretical groundwork that has been laid in chapter 1. The more intense gaze at single themes such as the incorporation issue and the Seretse Khama Affair will help to highlight Botswana's exceptional situation. Initially, however, we begin with a brief description of historic developments in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana.

The Bechuanaland Protectorate

Before the days of the British protectorate, Bechuanaland had included a territory far greater than present-day Botswana. While the southern part of Bechuanaland was incorporated into the Cape Colony in 1895, the territory of present-day Botswana formally became a British protectorate on 31st March 1885. However, this did not mean a major intervention into the affairs of the chiefs of the various Batswana tribes. Bechuanaland was only of strategic importance for the British wanting to prevent an expansion of the Boers and the Germans in southern Africa, who were showing apparent signs of co-operation in order to create a connected territory from the Transvaal to South West Africa.

Ten years after the establishment of the protectorate, Cecil John Rhodes' British South Africa Company (BSAC) attempted to acquire the territory of the protectorate just as they had done in Southern Rhodesia. The Batswana, who feared such a move, successfully intervened by sending three chiefs to London whose protests were heeded by the British Queen thus bringing Rhodes' plans to a standstill.¹

The highest legislative body in British colonial hierarchy was the British Parliament. Below Parliament, the Commonwealth Secretary in London was responsible for colonial affairs. The person in charge of the High Commission Territories was the High Commissioner who was based in his main field of activity, South Africa. In the case of Bechuanaland, the High Commissioner was assisted by the Resident Commissioner living in Mafikeng outside the borders of the protectorate. Additionally, there was a District Commissioner in every district and, in order to improve communication between the Resident Commissioner and the District Commissioners, two Divisional Commissioners

¹ Cf. Hopf 1991: pp. 67–68

were installed in 1950.² I will show to what extent these various officials were involved in dealing with Namibian freedom fighters and liberation movements.

The process of enlisting the people of the protectorate in active policy making was slow. The British strategy of indirect rule provided the various chiefs with substantial autonomy, but when it came to the overall administration of the protectorate, the Batswana were left with little influence. In 1919 a Native Advisory Council was installed whose name was changed to the African Advisory Council in 1940. This council served solely as a consulting body without any powers. After a merger of the African Advisory Council with the European Advisory Council, which had been a representative body of the European settlers, in 1951, a Legislative Council (LEGCO) was finally installed in 1961. Calls for such a council had been voiced more intensely at the end of the 1950s referring to the fact that LEGCOs had been established in other British colonies much earlier. Although LEGCO lacked any real power, it was used to recommend laws for the colonial government and could be considered as the closest thing to self-government. African LEGCO members were elected by the Batswana and its existence quickly led to the formation of political parties.

The first influential party had already been founded a year before the formation of LEGCO, the Bechuanaland People's Party (BPP). It rejected the creation of LEGCO and called for early independence. The BPP's main base of support was situated along the railway line in the east of the country and was led by Philip Matante, Kgaleman Motsete and Motsamai Mpho who had all been inspired by ANC and PAC in South Africa. Because of its radical rhetoric the BPP neither gathered support among traditional leaders or among British officials in the protectorate. There were also leadership discrepancies that led to a split into two factions. One faction was led by Motsamai Mpho, a Bayei from western Bechuanaland. Mpho eventually founded the Botswana Independence Party (BIP) in December 1963. Disagreements about BPP Youth League Protests in Francistown contributed to growing tensions between Matante and Motsete both of whom contested the elections for the first parliament in March 1965 with their respective factions of the party.³

However, neither the BIP nor one of the BPP factions emerged victorious out of the 1965 elections, which were organised by the British and were paving the way for Botswana's independence on 30 September 1966. Out of the 31 constituencies Seretse Khama's Bechuanaland (later Botswana) Democratic Party (BDP) won 28. Khama had founded the BDP in 1962, possibly with British support. His party included most of the

² Cf. Morton/Ramsay 1987: p. 3

³ Cf. Picard 1985: pp. 12–19

African LEGCO members and enjoyed unqualified support from the colonial protectorate government as well as from chiefs and European settlers. The BDP had all the financial and organisational support it needed for its campaign and was able to use LEGCO as a political platform. In the transition period to independence, Seretse Khama, who had, alongside several other BDP members, been a trainee minister in the colonial protectorate government, served as prime minister.⁴ When Botswana became independent Seretse Khama was inaugurated as President of the Republic and the government was made up of the BDP holding a comfortable majority in the National Assembly, the legislative organ of the Republic of Botswana. Botswana became a parliamentary democracy whose institutions were based on the Westminster model, although it included parts of a presidential type of government as well. Executive powers were exercised by the President, who was elected by the National Assembly, the Vice-President and the Ministers. Judicial powers were exercised by the High Court in Lobatse and several lower-level courts as well as by customary courts such as the Kgotla, a traditional Tswana assembly.⁵

The incorporation issue

In order to understand the constraints under which Britain was making policies in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, we need to go back as far as 1910 when the Union of South Africa was founded. The Union of South Africa Act of 1909, which laid the foundation for the formation of the Union a year later, provided for the eventual transfer of the British High Commission Territories Bechuanaland, Basotholand and Swaziland to South Africa.⁶ It stated: "On conditions laid down, territories might be transferred to the Union by the King with the advice of the Privy Council on address from the Union Parliament."⁷ Although the British made it very clear from the beginning that an eventual transfer would not take place without prior consultation with the Tswana chiefs and approval of the British Parliament, their understanding that ultimately they would hand over the three territories to South Africa, seemed to be apparent. Not only did they authorise the High Commissioner in South Africa to look after Bechuanaland, Basotholand and Swaziland instead of appointing a separate High Commissioner,⁸ some officials publicly stated that Britain's presence in the High Commission Territories would not be of a permanent nature. Lord Selbourne, for example, governor of the British Orange River Colony until its transformation into the South African constitutive Orange Free State Province, declared

⁴ Cf. Molomo/Molefe 2005: pp. 99–103

⁵ Zeil-Fahlbusch 1989: p. 43

⁶ Hyam 1972: p. 1

⁷ Walker 1963: p. 698

⁸ Cf. Morton/Ramsay 1987: pp. 1 f.

in 1910 that it would be “impossible to say how long it might be before the country was handed over, but in the natural course of things it would take place some day.”⁹

Conscious that her presence in the High Commission Territories was only temporary, Britain did not make a substantial effort to develop the protectorate. In 1885 when Bechuanaland had been declared a British protectorate, this had been done mainly for strategic reasons. Admittedly Britain had been asked for protection by three of the main Tswana chiefs, but this had happened as well on several occasions before, and, as has been mentioned, it was only when Britain feared an expansion of the Boers in the Transvaal and the Germans from South West Africa that she became aware of the strategic importance of the territory that Cecil John Rhodes used to call the “Suez-Canal to the North.”¹⁰ The British did not hesitate to announce their limited interest publicly. The British High Commissioner believed at the time that “we might confine ourselves for the present to preventing that part of the protectorate (i.e. Bechuanaland) being occupied by either filibusters or foreign powers, doing as little in the way of administration as possible.”¹¹ British neglect was therefore to become one of the most common arguments employed by successive South African Prime Ministers when claiming incorporation.

However, Britain’s attitude towards South Africa changed in the 1920s. Up to then as a consequence of the good relations between the British and South Africa’s Prime Minister, Jan Smuts who had served in the British War Cabinet during the First World War, South African claims were not challenged. Eventually the Southern Rhodesian declaration of internal self-government in 1923 and General Barry Hertzog’s victory in the South African elections in 1924 led to an altered British perception of the political situation in southern Africa.¹² Southern Rhodesia had been administered by Cecil John Rhodes’ British South Africa Company (BSAC). In a referendum in 1922 voters decided that this was no longer practical. By declaring internal self-government in 1923, white Rhodesians averted the threat of incorporation by the Union of South Africa, which appeared to be imminent shortly after the war. The Rhodesian factor was of primary importance for Bechuanaland because the railway line running through Bechuanaland and considered as a lifeline for the British protectorate, was operated by Rhodesian Railways. Incorporation of Rhodesia into the Union would consequently have made the incorporation of Bechuanaland almost inevitable. This unavoidable course of events was taken into account by the British. After the alteration of Rhodesia’s status though, South African involvement in the Bechuanaland question did not seem as necessary as before.

⁹ Hailey 1979: p. 207

¹⁰ Halpern 1965: p. 81

¹¹ Blue Book C. 4588. Quoted in: Sillery 1952: p. 96

¹² Cf. Hyam/Martin 1975: pp. 192 f.

Secondly, domestic politics in South Africa contributed a great deal to growing British hesitation towards incorporation of the High Commission Territories. Jan Smuts' South African Party (SAP) had been in power since the formation of the Union and despite occasional friction with the British, there was a general consensus in London that the SAP's rival party, Hertzog's National Party (NP), was not an acceptable alternative. In 1924, however, Smuts was defeated at the polls, and as the British did not have great confidence in Hertzog and his Afrikaner nationalists, the prospect of incorporation grew more distant than ever.¹³

Over the years it became increasingly evident that Britain's desire to cede the High Commission Territories diminished. As the influence of Afrikanerdom in South Africa was growing, British efforts in southern Africa were mainly aimed at curtailing South Africa's leverage as far as possible.¹⁴ Britain was supported in her endeavours by the Tswana Chiefs.¹⁵ The British now had strong grounds from which to argue as they could generously emphasise that incorporation into South Africa would be against the will of the people. On the other hand, the British position in southern Africa was not solid enough to ignore the recurrent South African claims for incorporation.

Finally, it was once again the South African electorate that influenced the incorporation issue. In 1934 Smuts' SAP and Hertzog's NP had merged into the United National South African Party. While this party governed the Union from 1934, a new Nationalist Party had started to grow massive support among the Afrikaners. It publicly advocated a policy of stronger racial segregation thereby successfully campaigning in the 1948 elections. The coalition government under Jan Smuts was voted out of office and Dr. D.F. Malan became Prime Minister. This was an unmistakable sign for Britain that a transfer of her protectorates would expose their inhabitants to very unfavourable racial policies. Ronald Hyam expressed this very clearly: "In winning the elections, the Nationalists ensured the defeat of South African expansion."¹⁶ While Jan Smuts might have hoped for British generosity with respect to the incorporation campaign, the Malan government and its successors did not become recipients of any British sympathy. British ambition to please the South African government started to fade while South Africa's courtesy towards the British was not much greater.¹⁷

Nevertheless Britain's constant and blunt refusal to transfer the High Commission Territories did not prompt South Africa to abstain from her incorporation claims. By means

¹³ Cf. Hyam/Martin 1975: p. 194

¹⁴ Cf. Heinlein 2002: p. 120

¹⁵ Cf. Vaughan 2003: p. 45

¹⁶ Hyam 1972: p. 178

¹⁷ Cf. Dale 1987: p. 130

of the Tomlinson Commission Report, published in 1956, she tried to prove that the High Commission Territories had been artificially excluded from the Union and should actually be administered under the Bantustan system, which had already been proposed for the territory of South Africa.¹⁸ This would have meant a separate development of races – a prospect not particularly uplifting for the British. Feeling inhibited by the dominating presence of the Union in southern Africa, British policy did not seem clear, but there was wide consensus that a transfer of the protectorates was out of question.¹⁹

Hence it was not surprising that attacks from Pretoria on Britain and its colonial policy became more and more vigorous, yet this did not alter the situation. As the evidence of decolonisation had finally arrived on the African continent, it seemed to be the unavoidable logic that a decolonisation process had to be initiated in the High Commission Territories. Regardless of this unfavourable development, South African Prime Minister Henrik Verwoerd launched a last attempt to realise South African claims north of the Molopo River. On 3 September 1963 he called for a plebiscite in the High Commission Territories, but the solid condemnation by African politicians and chiefs made him aware that this struggle was no more than a lost cause. On 2 June 1964 he finally had to accept the constitutional proposals for independence of the High Commission Territories.²⁰

The Seretse Khama Affair

As this brief summary of the incorporation issue illustrates, incorporation was a latent and, at times, open threat almost throughout the entire existence of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. However, before we start to look at how observers evaluated Britain's political situation in the protectorate, we examine a matter of conflict in Bechuanaland that exemplifies British–South African relations in the protectorate: the “Seretse Khama affair”.

In respect of British–South African relations it became clear that political developments, at the time when incorporation seemed less likely, strengthened South Africa's position in the southern African state system. For one thing, South African governments were able to operate from a solid position because there was no real challenge in domestic politics, neither economically, nor from strong political opposition. For another, Rhodesian elections in 1962 were a great boost for South Africa's apartheid policies. The right-wing Rhodesian Front (RF) came into power thereby prolonging the racist rule of the white man on the other side of the Limpopo River. This was virtual confirmation

¹⁸ Cf. Stevens 1967: p. 8

¹⁹ Cf. Barber 1973: p. 111

²⁰ Cf. Stevens 1967: p. 150

of the “isolation of the High Commission Territories from the main stream of African political development further north.”²¹

Above all, however, the dispute about Seretse Khama’s marriage with the white British clerk, Ruth Williams, illustrated British uncertainty when interacting with South Africa. Seretse Khama was the legitimate successor to the throne of the Bangwato. When his father Sekgoma died in 1925, he was still too young to take over and it was decided that Seretse’s uncle Tshekedi was to act as an interim chief. After his studies in South Africa, Seretse was sent to England to study law. This is where he got engaged to Ruth Williams whom he married without consulting his uncle or any tribal authority, who would have certainly had strong objections to the marriage of the designated Bangwato chief to a white woman. Not only did this marriage spark popular outrage among the Bangwato when Seretse and Ruth returned to Bechuanaland in 1948, it led to even more of a vehement storm of protest from South Africa culminating in a severe crisis. In the eyes of the South African government Seretse’s marriage was a clear violation of its philosophy of racial segregation, and therefore it had to be condemned in the strongest terms. Not surprisingly, the British became the recipient of South African demands to immediately put pressure on Seretse to solve the issue, which had already received public international attention.²²

Despite British assurances that their action was based on the objective to avoid intra-tribal conflicts, it is widely assumed that the following banning of Seretse was primarily a consequence of South African pressure exercised both publicly and diplomatically. Only in 1956 was Seretse allowed to return to the protectorate under the understanding that he would renounce chieftainship. His uncle Tshekedi who had publicly ranted and raved about Seretse’s marriage was made to abdicate, too. Seretse’s abdication, however, did not mean his disappearance from the political sphere. On the contrary, he was then able to act above tribal politics, a sign that South African leverage was restricted; Pretoria could not force the British to make Seretse step down from any public office at all.²³

Developments in the first years after independence

From the beginning of independence, politics in Botswana were dominated by Seretse Khama’s BDP. Due to internal inconsistencies and lack of grassroots as well as organisational and financial support, both the BPP and BIP did not manage to emerge as a strong opposition. In October 1965, however, Kenneth Koma had already formed the Botswana National Front (BNF). Originally meant to reunite BIP and BPP, the BNF was to become

²¹ Doxey 1963: p. 51

²² Cf. Picard 1985: pp. 10–16

²³ Cf. Tlou/Parsons/Henderson 1995: pp. 150–154

the strongest opposition party, which succeeded in gathering support among some traditional leaders. Chief Bathoen II of the Bangwaketse, for example, stood as presidential candidate for the BNF in the 1969 elections.²⁴ Although the BDP lost by a large margin of votes in the 1969 elections, it still had a substantial majority in the National Assembly and, as in the 1974 and 1979 elections, Seretse Khama was re-elected



Fig. 2: Seretse and Ruth Khama “celebrating victory in the February 1965 general election”

President. BIP (Northwest) and BPP (Northeast) only had regional strongholds, whereas the BNF gained support mainly in urban centres. The political system, however, was dominated by a coalition of wealthy, well-educated, cattle-owning political elites who were all members of or aligned to the BDP.²⁵

Nevertheless elections were always conducted in a free and fair manner, and Botswana started to gain a reputation as a liberal democracy, which was particularly remarkable because of all the turbulence in the southern African region. In addition to the National Assembly, a House of Chiefs was established, which was to be used as an advisory body to the national institutions. It did not serve as a second chamber of parliament but, since it consisted of the chiefs of the eight major Tswana tribes and of four additional specially appointed members, it helped to include traditional authorities into the nation-building process. In contrast to other African countries, colonial officers were not sent away directly after independence. Some British officials, as in the case of the former District Commissioner in Francistown, Philipp Steenkamp, continued to serve in the administration and were only replaced gradually during the course of time. The last European District Administrators withdrew in 1974 and thereby helped to guarantee a smooth transition.²⁶

Regionalisation, however, was a slow process. In each of Botswana's nine districts, a district administration was established, which was mainly used as a government agent to monitor district political activity and, if necessary, to intervene with the backing of

²⁴ Cf. Lekorwe 2005: pp. 128–133

²⁵ Cf. Picard 1985a: pp.19 ff.

²⁶ Cf. Ibid.: pp. 19–20

the President to control potential political challenges.²⁷ The largest sums of the national budget, which was independent from foreign aid for the first time in the financial year 1972/73, were spent in the sectors of health, education and transport. Although this led to great improvements in the urban centres, rural areas were very much neglected in the initial years. Only in 1973 did the government start an Accelerated Rural Development Programme, admittedly though in light of the upcoming parliamentary elections in 1974. Population growth was rapid, and along with it came an increasing urbanisation in all major towns situated along the railway line in the southeast of the country. This, however, did not endanger Botswana's profile as a role model for peace and stability in the region.²⁸

Botswana's geopolitical and economic situation

Looking at the geopolitical constellation in southern Africa until Zimbabwean independence in 1980, Bechuanaland and Botswana respectively turn out to have been entangled in a very difficult position among countries with white minority regimes. There is only a minimal, almost insignificant border with Northern Rhodesia, which became independent as Zambia in 1964.²⁹ Although the existence of this border crossing in the middle of the Zambezi River was constantly challenged by South Africa, it was to become vital for the exodus of freedom fighters from both Namibia and South Africa.

An even greater disproportion has to be attributed to economic factors. By the time of independence in 1966, Botswana was very much underdeveloped and economically backward.³⁰ Apart from agriculture, there was very little that the Tswana people were engaged in. Mining was still in its fledgling stages and the discovery of the first diamonds in 1967 only slowly paved the way for economic growth. This is why labour migration had become absolutely essential for the survival of many Batswana. At any given time a fifth of all male Tswana workers recruited by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) were working in South African mines on the Witwatersrand. The migrant workers' remittances accounted for a considerable part of the income for Tswana families. On the other hand, migrant workers were simply considered cheap labour by the owners of South Africa's mining companies.³¹

When mining eventually started to develop in Botswana, the country relied on huge investments from the Republic of South Africa. De Beers especially became deeply involved in diamond exploitation in Botswana's three diamond mines Jwaneng, Orapa and

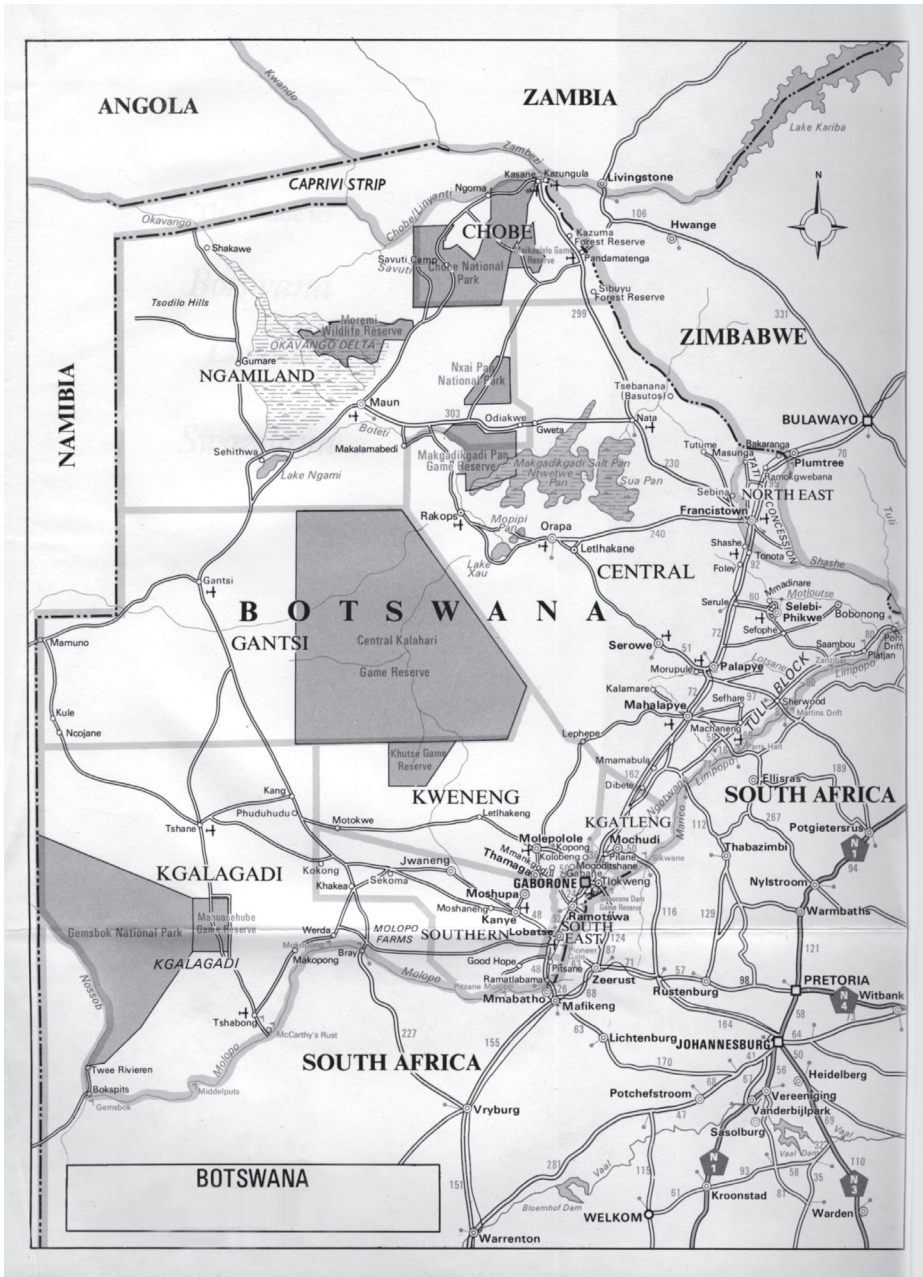
²⁷ Cf. Picard 1985b: pp. 176 ff.

²⁸ Cf. Ibid.: pp. 194 ff.

²⁹ Cf. Potholm/Dale 1972: p. 110

³⁰ Cf. Picard 1985: pp. 41 ff.

³¹ Cf. Ibid.: pp. 48 ff.



Map 2: Botswana

Letlhakane, although under reasonably favourable conditions for the state of Botswana.³² However, in addition to this superiority in capital, South Africa enjoyed a well-developed infrastructure and held important routes of transport and major deep-sea ports on which Botswana was largely reliant.³³ To make matters worse, the Bechuanaland Protectorate and later Botswana were, along with South Africa and the other British High Commission Territories Basotholand and Swaziland, part of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which proved to be a mixed blessing.³⁴ Additionally, the location of Bechuanaland's capital illustrated the protectorate's dependence: Before the capital was moved to Gaborone in 1965, the British administration had resided in Mafeking outside the Bechuanaland borders.

Room for manoeuvre or dependence?

Political freedom for the Bechuanaland Protectorate

It is now time to look at the degree of freedom Britain was enjoying in decision-making in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. As indicated before, analyses of Bechuanaland and Botswana politics range from very limited room for manoeuvre due to dependence on South Africa to a substantial degree of political freedom. This substantial political freedom, however, has mainly been observed during the years of an independent Botswana. As we now focus on politics in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, we will be faced with rather pessimistic views of Britain's room for manoeuvre.

A theoretical examination of political freedom of political leaders in the protectorate is based on the works of Halpern, Munger and Hailey. None of them actually attributes a considerably sovereign status to Bechuanaland. Lord Hailey's study on the British High Commission Territories was released in 1963, two years before Halpern's and Munger's analyses. This implied that, at the time of publication, the constitutional process towards independence had not yet progressed much in Bechuanaland. Limits to the sovereign status of the territory must have therefore been more visible. The Lobatse Constitutional Agreement, which paved the way for Botswana's independence, was only signed in August 1963,³⁵ hence significant changes had taken place between the issuing of Halpern's, Munger's and Hailey's studies. Nonetheless, all three authors looked at developments within a wider time frame and did not restrict their comments to the contemporary situation. Hailey did not detect any relationship of complex interdependence; his understand-

³² Cf. Samatar 1999: pp. 19–20

³³ Cf. Butts/Thomas 1986: pp. 13 ff.

³⁴ Cf. Picard 1985: pp. 114–115

³⁵ Cf. Tlou/Parsons/Henderson 1995: p. 212

ing of all three British protectorates in southern Africa was one of being “satellites” of the Republic³⁶ (i.e. South Africa).

Jack Halpern even chose the title “South Africa’s hostages” for his analysis of the British High Commission Territories Basotholand, Bechuanaland and Swaziland. Halpern held economic and geopolitical causes responsible for their hostage status. He emphasised that the Bechuanaland Protectorate was “practically bankrupt”³⁷ in 1933 and predicted that South Africa would rather apply a “policy of economic hostility”.³⁸ He pointed out that the territory of Bechuanaland was enclosed by hostile states. As this was a situation that could not possibly be altered by officials in the protectorate, it was regarded as Bechuanaland’s “sorest point” by Halpern.³⁹

Nonetheless, some optimism was conveyed by Halpern’s analysis. While he admitted that the protectorate might have had to give in over refugee issues due to pressures from its southern neighbour, he also detected a potential source of strength for the protectorate. This is Bechuanaland’s “virtue of its being so great a potential source of trouble for South Africa.”⁴⁰ By looking at Bechuanaland’s state of captivity in this way, the problem of its being surrounded by territories governed by white minority regimes was turned around. In fact, it has been mentioned before that Bechuanaland’s territory was of crucial importance for liberation movements, and therefore it was quite a challenge for Pretoria to make sure that this importance was limited. This, in return, might have widened the room for manoeuvre for the protectorate. It is thus illustrated that this potential problem could have turned out to be an advantage for the protectorate, too. However, Halpern forecasted a “troubled future”⁴¹ for the protectorate and the future state of Botswana, given all the restrictions it was facing.

Edwin S. Munger equally looked at South Africa’s dominance in the region. In his book “Bechuanaland: Pan-African Outpost or Bantu Homeland?” he referred to South Africa’s concept of separate development which allowed for the establishment of Bantu Homelands that would be very much dependent on South Africa. Munger refers to British policy in the protectorate as a policy of “strictest neutrality” which could account for the refusal of political asylum in certain instances as happened in a case in March 1964.⁴² In his conclusion, Munger emphasised Bechuanaland’s great dependency on South Africa, but at the same time he admitted, that Pretoria’s position of hegemony did not

³⁶ Hailey 1963: p. 125

³⁷ Halpern 1965: p. 271

³⁸ Ibid.: p. 328

³⁹ Ibid.: p. 326

⁴⁰ Ibid.: p. 328

⁴¹ Ibid.: p. 326

⁴² Munger 1965: p. 84–85

automatically permit all actions to put pressure on less powerful neighbouring territories. He alluded to the fact that the threat of violence was certainly a trump card, but in the same breath acknowledged that a “trump can only be played once.”⁴³ In other words: it was out of the question that South Africa could permanently occupy Bechuanaland or constantly attack its territory. Thus, the intimidation from Pretoria might have been less severe than generally regarded. However, by recognising Bechuanaland’s dependence on the Republic, he acknowledges that a way towards self conscious Pan-Africanism was just as possible as being a part of South Africa’s Bantustan concept.⁴⁴

Analyses that were published at a more advanced stage of Botswana’s independence came to the same conclusion that Bechuanaland’s dependence and, consequently, the limited room for manoeuvre its political leaders had, could not have been overlooked. By connecting Bechuanaland’s destiny closely to Zimbabwe, Q.N. Parsons identified a “hostage period”⁴⁵ of Bechuanaland and Botswana respectively between 1963 and Zimbabwean independence in 1980. The connection that Parsons drew alluded to the fact that even a Rhodesian takeover of Bechuanaland was discussed at some stage and also pointed to Bechuanaland’s dependency on Rhodesian Railways.

These examinations certainly have to be kept in mind when looking at the handling of the refugee issue in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. As has been suggested, British decisions made in this context should be seen in light of a certain South African pressure being exerted on Britain. However, Britain’s firm stand in the context of the incorporation issue draws a more diverse picture of British political freedom in the protectorate. It is therefore important to understand more clearly how Namibians benefited from potential British defiance of South African pressure in the early years of their liberation struggle, a time when movements towards and through Bechuanaland seemed to be of vital importance.

Political freedom for the Republic of Botswana

Sceptics of Botswana’s future put it very clearly when the country became independent on 30 September 1966, “The best the country could aspire to [...] was to be a functional Bantustan of South Africa.”⁴⁶ At that stage, however, it was difficult to estimate how Botswana could emancipate herself both from Britain and South Africa and how she could commit herself to independent policy making. There is no doubt that as economic growth, mainly due to the exploitation of diamond deposits, successfully moved forward and as Botswana engaged in the Frontline-States Movement, her political freedom

⁴³ Munger 1965: p. 89

⁴⁴ Cf. Ibid.: p. 113–114

⁴⁵ Parsons 1985: p. 34

⁴⁶ Grant/Ramsay 1987: p. 187

widened substantially. Not surprisingly, did Olaf Claus, in his dissertation published in 1992, come to the conclusion that the relationship between Botswana and South Africa could be characterised as an asymmetrical interdependence still in favour of South Africa, but with considerably improving conditions for Botswana over the years.⁴⁷

This evaluation, however, is of limited importance here as we are mainly dealing with the period up to 1974. Some scholars, such as Larry W. Bowman, have looked at southern Africa as a “subordinate state system”. Bowman suggests that this system was kept together by the dominance of South African wealth and its economic demands. As Bowman puts the importance of the economic factor above everything, he does not assign to Malawi and the former High Commission Territories a great impact on the stability of the southern African power structure. Consequently, he argues that these will have to suffer from a “lengthy, if not perpetual dependence on the good will and favour of South Africa.”⁴⁸

It is debatable, though, whether such dependence actually resulted in limited or even non-existent political room for manoeuvre for the Botswana government. Other commentators stressed the political focus of their analyses and reasoned that South Africa’s political leverage over Botswana should not be overestimated. This argument seems to be a mere consequence of the different understanding of international power relations. Christopher R. Hill and Zdenek Cervenka, for example, reject the determinants advocated by political realists. Their approaches include moral values as well as an appreciation of the existence of multinational organisations. Hill does not deny, that in the case of Rhodesia, Botswana was not able to comply with the sanctions against the racist Smith-Regime, but he does emphasise that the application of the four principles of Botswana’s ruling party (BDP) had a substantial impact on the morally firm position the country was trying to achieve. This position strengthened Botswana’s authority both in the region and in international relations. As the BDP’s four principles Hill lists “democracy, development, self-reliance and unity”.⁴⁹ By means of this moral authority Botswana was capable of resisting South Africa in well-selected instances. The Botswana government refused, for example, to accept any aid from Pretoria. Hill therefore concludes that Botswana enjoyed, at the time of his study in 1972, “many freedoms which were denied to a Bantustan.”⁵⁰

Interestingly, on several occasions analysts drew a comparison between the political freedom of a Bantustan and that of Botswana and of the other former High Commission Territories. At the beginning of the 1970s, the development of the Bantustan concept

⁴⁷ Cf. Claus 1992: pp. 201 ff.

⁴⁸ Bowman 1968: p. 239

⁴⁹ Hill 1972: p. 55

⁵⁰ Ibid.: p. 62

was already in an advanced state. Although the first Bantu Homeland formally became independent in 1976 (Transkei), the Bantustan concept did, although interpreted differently by the South African government, not mean more than formal sovereignty, and no South African Homeland was ever recognised internationally.

The focus of Colin Legum's study is likewise on Botswana's policies. We may recall Hermans' statement on Botswana's being a land-locked country. But this "lonely and expensive experience"⁵¹ Botswana was forced into did not automatically make it flinch from pursuing her own policies as far as possible. In fact, by constantly emphasising Botswana's multi-racial policies, Seretse Khama openly challenged South Africa's apartheid policies of racial segregation.⁵² Legum provides an explanation for the possibility of this challenge: He argues that South Africa could not take strong action against Botswana and at the same time publicly advocate her "policy of good neighbourliness".⁵³ Although the racist character of the South African regime was known around the world, the South African government still tried to make a good impression in the diplomatic arena. In the case of Botswana, these efforts led to a limited possibility of enforcing its will on its northern neighbour.

This illustrates that the use of force stressed in Morgenthau's political realism can, at least in this case, not be regarded as a wise and legitimate analytical category in international politics. On the contrary, as has been suggested by Keohane and Nye, a growing influence of multinational organisations could be observed. Institutions like the United Nations were certainly of distinct importance when South Africa was trying to make propaganda for her policy of dialogue in the diplomatic arena.

This propaganda, however, was accompanied by an imperialist foreign policy. Kenneth W. Grundy elaborates that South Africa's economic strength was "hand in glove" with her "outward policy".⁵⁴ He argues that it was Pretoria's pronounced goal to exploit her economic dominance in a way that the results of political conflicts could be manipulated in favour of South Africa. Grundy admits that in a particular case it was difficult to actually spot a direct connection between South African economic support for a southern African neighbour and the foreign policy of the recipient country.⁵⁵ Despite a clear lack of evidence, Grundy does not look at Botswana's room for manoeuvre as being that great, but adds, "even if the range of choices is severely limited, some choices nevertheless under-

⁵¹ Hermans 1973: p. 210

⁵² Cf. Legum 1973: p. 169 f.

⁵³ Cf. Ibid.: p. 175

⁵⁴ Grundy 1973: p. 32

⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid.: p. 74

lie their [i.e. Botswana's] decisions."⁵⁶ This example once again exemplifies that it was necessary to draw a differentiated picture of relationships in the southern African region.

Similarly, Timothy M. Shaw analysed Botswana's constraints in policy making. He detected a limited range of options open to Botswana, but along with Legum, he pointed to South Africa's need to be respected internationally. Pretoria's range of choices would therefore be limited. Further, it has to be taken into account that the South African government was striving for regional integration and closer co-operation among southern African countries. Naturally, Pretoria wanted the international community to look at this process of functional integration as a "voluntary option". Had she put too much pressure on Botswana for example, these efforts would have appeared in a very negative light.⁵⁷

A hint at South Africa's limited policy options fails to recognise Botswana's own contribution to widen her room for political manoeuvre. Like Christopher Hill, Willie Henderson tried to stay abreast of the fact that Botswana was able to manipulate the international system in order to develop an independent foreign policy. In contrast to Hill though he does not regard Botswana's dependence as inevitable. In an essay on Botswana's foreign policy options, he points to two single events that framed Botswana's efforts to establish her own ideology. According to Henderson, Botswana's careful, yet convincing, stance on the Lusaka Manifesto in 1969 (a common declaration of southern and central African states calling for black majority rule in all southern African states while leaving the door open for further negotiations), and a speech given by Seretse Khama at the twenty-fourth General Assembly of the United Nations, formed the intellectual parameters of Botswana's foreign policy on southern African issues. The Lusaka Manifesto, which was later adopted by the OAU and the UN, was not signed by Botswana immediately, although the Khama government did make clear that its country condemned the policies of Apartheid. In his declaration at the General Assembly Khama stressed the liberal ideology of his country in the southern African context. He managed to convince the UN of the special situation Botswana was facing in relation to sanctions. Henderson asserts that these two occurrences reveal that by manipulating the international system in her favour Botswana managed to develop an independent foreign policy.⁵⁸

As has become clear from the recent analyses, even in the first years of independence, Botswana managed to substantially widen her degree of political freedom. Throughout the liberation struggle severe constraints due to the nature of power relations had to be taken into account. At the same time South Africa was not acting in a vacuum. It too

⁵⁶ Ibid.: p. 82

⁵⁷ Cf. Shaw 1974: p. 648

⁵⁸ Cf. Henderson 1974: p. 37–49

had to consider characteristics of interdependence. No one can honestly argue that this interdependence was not in favour of South Africa yet, as has been emphasised, political leaders in Botswana were far from powerless. Botswana's and Bechuanaland's limited degree of political freedom will admittedly be an issue throughout this book. This, however, does not imply that policy-makers were not left with choices when dealing with the refugee issue. We will therefore have to watch carefully to assess whether Bechuanaland's and Botswana's actions in the context of the Namibian liberation struggle can be attributed to little room for manoeuvre and South African pressure or if they are, at least partly, a result of free decision making.

Namibia

The following account places events into the broader context of political developments in Namibia. One point of focus will thus be on the Namibian liberation movements whose activities in Botswana are dealt with in the sixth and seventh chapters. For this reason it is useful to consider further background information such as their formation, approaches to the liberation struggle and their international standing.

An outline of historical developments in South West Africa

The territory that is today known as Namibia became a German protectorate in 1884. While the northern part of Namibia was of marginal importance for the Germans, Nama, Damara and Ovaherero suffered considerably under their colonial masters in central and southern Namibia. Increasing disfranchisement and land seizure led to the confrontation of the Ovaherero in January 1904 and of the Nama in October 1904 with the Germans. The brutal reaction of the Germans under the command of General Lothar von Trotha became known as genocide and led to the death of about 65,000 Ovaherero and more than 10,000 Nama.⁵⁹ As will be explained later, some groups of surviving Ovaherero and Nama managed to escape through the Omaheke Sandveld and the Kalahari into the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

After a quick defeat by South African troops in the Second World War in 1915, Germany was forced to cede South West Africa. The treaty of Versailles declared South West Africa a mandated territory under the League of Nations, which was to be administered by the Union of South Africa. The latter regarded South West Africa simply as a part of her ter-

⁵⁹ Cf. Drechsler 1991 : p. 58. There is still a controversy on how many Ovaherero were killed by the Germans as well as how many actually reached Bechuanaland. Poewe (1985: p. 62) and Drechsler (1980: pp. 166–67) mention a number of 1,500 who came to Bechuanaland. Lau (1989) challenges the generally accepted figures of the 'genocide'. See also Dederling's response (1993) for further understanding.

ritory and did not treat Namibians any gentler than the Germans had done.⁶⁰ Uprisings such as those of the Bondelswarts in 1922 and the Rehobothers in 1925 met with brutal force.⁶¹ All South African racial laws now applied in South West Africa, which, after the dissolution of the League of Nations, South Africa regarded as her fifth province. After the Second World War South Africa did not recognise the territory as a mandated territory under the newly established United Nations, but demanded incorporation into the Union. The basis of South Africa's rationale was a referendum among South West African citizens conducted in late 1945 and early 1946, which allegedly supported the idea of incorporation. There was more than a little doubt about this referendum,⁶² but South Africa argued that since the League of Nations was no longer in existence, there was no longer any need to care about any such mandates. As will be discussed further, Namibians soon petitioned the United Nations in order to prove that South African occupation was illegal. As early as 1953 a UN Permanent Committee on South West Africa was established by the United Nations.

It took until 1971 for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to finally arrive at this conclusion. By 1960 Ethiopia and Libya, at that time among the few independent African countries, had taken legal action against South Africa's ongoing presence in South West Africa. Despite a resolution of the UN General Assembly, shortly after the ICJ's sentence, condemning South Africa's occupation of South West Africa as illegal, the court ruled on 18 July 1966 that Ethiopia and Libya were not involved in the case and therefore turned it down.⁶³ At the time of the ruling the sentence seemed to be the end of the aspirations of many Namibians for international support in their struggle for independence. By that time the National Party had been in power in South Africa for almost twenty years having continuously amplified its policies of racial segregation both in South Africa and in South West Africa. Indeed, the UN recognised its responsibility for South West Africa and established a UN Council for South West Africa (later Namibia), which was meant to administer Namibia; this was never accepted by Pretoria whose illegal occupation simply continued.⁶⁴

The Namibian liberation struggle

In most African colonies whether British, French, Portuguese or Belgian, the African peoples were, in the beginning, striving for liberation by peaceful means. Only when it

⁶⁰ Cf. First 1963: pp. 98 ff.

⁶¹ Cf. Harneit-Sievers 1985: p. 6

⁶² Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 251

⁶³ Cf. Gibson 1972: p. 112

⁶⁴ Cf. Moleah 183: p. 143

became clear that independence could not be achieved peacefully did liberation movements regard the use of force as a last resort. In particular, this applied to the Portuguese colonies and the southern African states with white minority regimes. South West Africa was a *de facto* colony of South Africa and therefore faced similar problems as Africans in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola.

After the first decade of petitioning the United Nations, the liberation struggle in Namibia became increasingly co-ordinated with the formation of SWANU and SWAPO in 1959 and 1960 respectively. SWAPO launched its armed struggle on 26 August 1966. The Namibian liberation struggle thus became a guerrilla war operating at very low intensity initially, which was to engage the South Africans more extensively after the Portuguese withdrawal from Angola and the advent of Angolan independence in 1974/75. From that time the war for liberation in Namibia was intertwined with the Angolan civil war as the South African Defence Force (SADF) pursued the Namibian guerrilla fighters into Angolan territory where SWAPO enjoyed protection from the MPLA government.



Fig. 3: Petitioners on the Namibian cause to the United Nations in 1960: Seated in the first row, from left to right: Mbumbura Kerina, Jariretundu Kozonguizi and Rev Michael Scott

The South Africans were collaborating with Jonas Savimbi's rebel movement UNITA, which partly operated from Namibian territory.⁶⁵

In 1975 South Africa established the "Turnhalle Constitutional Conference" in Windhoek, which could be considered as nothing more than a South African propaganda instrument. Its purpose was to quieten down international protests. It was composed only of ethnic parties collaborating with the South African regime. In 1978 the UN Security Council Resolution 435 paved the way for Namibian independence. It demanded free elections under UN supervision; however, the elections that took place in the context of the Turnhalle in the end of 1978 were declared as "null and void".⁶⁶

South Africa's continuous delaying tactics and the various impacts of cold war strategies, not least American-Cuban rivalries, protracted the realisation of Resolution 435 for more than a decade (Cuba had sent troops to Angola in support of the MPLA government). Under supervision of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), elections finally took place between 7 and 11 November 1989. In these elections, SWAPO gained an absolute majority in parliament, and on the day of independence, 21 March 1990, Sam Nujoma became Namibia's first President.⁶⁷

SWANU

In the case of both SWANU and SWAPO the roots of organised Namibian nationalism are to be found in South Africa. Since its rise to power in 1948, the National Party had introduced strong measures of racial segregation that made everyday life more and more unbearable for all non-whites in the Union. The ANC had started to oppose the regime in Pretoria more vigorously and was preparing for an armed struggle long before the founding of the Namibian liberation movements. In 1952 the ANC organised a defiance campaign in which its participants refused to obey certain racial laws as a protest against the state of injustice in the Union.⁶⁸

During the course of this campaign, South West African students in South Africa formed the South West African Students Body (SWASB) with Jariretundu Kozonguizi as president and Mburumba Kerina as secretary-general. Although the SWASB did not gather support beyond intellectual circles, it prepared the ground for future nationalist organisations. It widened its base in 1955 when it was renamed the South West African Progressive Association (SWAPA). SWAPA, which was led by Uatja Kaukuetu, began to manoeuvre towards a more political nationalism. Where previously the Ovaherero had

⁶⁵ Cf. Harneit-Sievers 1985: pp. 51 ff.

⁶⁶ Welch 2001: p. 183

⁶⁷ Cf. Ansprenger 1991: pp. 109 ff.

⁶⁸ Cf. Gibson 1972: p. 50



Fig. 4: SWANU and SWAPO leaders with the Swedish politician Olof Palme in Uppsala in August 1966. From left to right: Andreas Shipanga (SWAPO), Sam Nujoma (SWAPO), Solomon Mifima (SWAPO), Zedekia Ngavirue (SWANU) and Nora Schimming (SWANU)

been the most outspoken people in South West Africa in protesting against the injustices of racial segregation, it was SWAPA's distinctive goal to eradicate any forms of tribalism and to promote the interests of all South West African people. Nonetheless, SWAPA remained an organisation of the intelligentsia, although notions of Namibian nationalism were found among contract workers in South Africa as well as among the chiefs of the Ovaherero. Thus the idea arose to form a unified movement

that would include the organisation of the Ovambo contract workers from northern South West Africa as well as the chiefs. The idea came to fruition when the South West African National Union (SWANU) was founded on 27 September 1959. Jariretundu Kozonguizi, who had already been sent to New York by Herero chief Hosea Kutako in order to join Mburumba Kerina (who was there since 1956) in petitioning the United Nations, was elected president *in absentia*. Kaukuetu as vice-president became the effective leader of the organisation. The other posts were split evenly among members of the Ovamboland People's organisation (OPO) and SWAPA. Since neither OPO, nor the Herero Chief's Council was dissolved with the formation of SWANU, confusion arose regarding the actual relations between the different organisations. Chief Hosea Kutako and his designated successor, Clemence Kapuuo, believed that they would be able to control the newly formed organisation. When they discovered that this was not possible, they quickly disassociated themselves from SWANU.⁶⁹

This split became obvious when the South African government announced that it was going to build a new township for all Africans in Windhoek living in the "Old Location" close to the city centre from where they were to be removed. This announcement led to mass protests and a bus boycott on 10 December 1959 against which the South African police reacted with brutal force. In the aftermath, 11 people were killed and 44 wounded.

⁶⁹ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 320 and Ngavirue 1997 : pp. 218–219

The protest was mainly organised by SWANU, but in the following hearings on the massacre in 1960, Clemence Kapuuu denied any involvement, thereby paving the way for a break-up of SWANU and the indigenous Herero leadership.⁷⁰

SWANU's situation became more difficult when other leading figures such as Kaukue-tu and Charles Kauraisa left South West Africa for overseas study.⁷¹ In any event, OPO had never been deeply involved with SWANU. In 1960 OPO changed its name to SWAPO.⁷²

SWANU's and SWAPO's objectives did not differ substantially. There were, however, personal animosities among the leading figures in exile, in particular between Kozonguizi and Kerina, who had emerged as one of SWAPO's leading figures. Both SWANU and SWAPO were originally recognised by the organisation of African Unity (OAU) and its African Liberation Committee (ALC), which had both been formed in 1963. In addition, both organisations were striving for international recognition and support. Not only in Namibia had it become obvious that it was the socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union and China, who were supportive of liberation movements.

Due to the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s, remaining on friendly terms with both China and the Soviet Union was a difficult diplomatic tightrope to walk. This challenge proved too much for SWANU to deal with successfully. When Jariretundu Kozonguizi, still SWANU-President, visited China in 1960 he complained about the passivity of the United Nations. This statement was not well received in western countries; the Soviet Union too had strong objections because of SWANU's affiliation with China. There were a few attempts by both SWANU and SWAPO to reunite the two organisations, particularly in 1963 when the South West African National Liberation Front (SWANLIF) briefly came into existence. Thereafter though, SWANU became increasingly isolated. It did not have a strong base in South West Africa, nor did it gather enough support in the diplomatic arena. Consequently, it lost recognition by the OAU.⁷³

This was also a result of Kozonguizi's supposed refusal to use violence if all other action failed because, while Kozonguizi did not regard his organisation as prepared for such an undertaking, it was official policy of the OAU to base its support for the liberation movements on the decision to use force as a last resort. Despite many of SWANU's leaders having obtained an outstanding education in overseas countries such as Sweden and the United States, SWANU, as an organisation, began to move closer to political insignificance.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 311

⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*: p. 312

⁷² Cf. Ngavirue 1997: p. 221

⁷³ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 330

⁷⁴ Cf. Sellström 1999: pp. 265 ff.

After the Chinese boycotted the conference of the Afro Asian People's organisation (AAPSO) in Nicosia in 1967, SWANU was expelled from this organisation.⁷⁵ From that time on it did not succeed in playing a major role in Namibia's liberation struggle.

SWAPO

As briefly alluded to above in the account on SWANU, SWAPO's predecessor was the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO). OPO arose out of the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC), an organisation that had existed informally since 1957. It had originally been created as a body to defend the interests of the South West African workers in Cape Town, who mainly came from Ovamboland. The most prominent figures in the OPC were Herman Toivo yaToivo, Andreas Shipanga and Solomon Mifima.⁷⁶

OPO was officially launched on 19 April 1959. Sam Nujoma became president, Luis Nelengani vice-president and Jacob Kuhangua became chairman of the Windhoek branch.⁷⁷ When it became clear that OPO would not entirely dissolve, and when tensions between Kozonguizi and Kerina in New York intensified, Kerina suggested that OPO should adopt a new name reflecting its altered position, not merely as an Ovambo organisation but rather as a representative of all peoples of South West Africa. Kerina, based abroad, had realised that potential donors reacted very sensitively to any notions of tribalism and, therefore, OPO was renamed SWAPO in June 1960.⁷⁸

During the early years of its existence, there was good co-operation between SWAPO and the Ovaherero, despite the volley of reproaches of tribalism. When it became clear that their influence had shrunk, the Ovaherero finally disassociated from SWAPO. The latter no longer relied on support from the traditional Herero elite.

Although no Namibian liberation movement was officially banned by the South African government, political agitation against South Africa's occupation was made virtually impossible. For this reason, most influential SWAPO leaders left their country mainly via Bechuanaland or Botswana respectively, in order to mobilise support for their goals within the international community and, in particular, in the newly independent African countries. Dar es Salaam became the centre of many southern African liberation movements in exile and SWAPO's headquarters were established there. Sam Nujoma soon became the overall leader of the liberation struggle, whereas Mburumba Kerina, the

⁷⁵ Cf. Gibson 1972: p. 129

⁷⁶ Cf. Harneit-Sievers 1985: p. 8

⁷⁷ Cf. Harneit-Sievers 1985: p. 11

⁷⁸ Cf. Ngavirue 1997: p. 221

first Namibian petitioner at the United Nations, was expelled from SWAPO for negotiating with Kozonguizi, allegedly against the interests of SWAPO.

SWAPO's (led by David Meroro) potential for wielding influence internally, was severely limited.⁷⁹ Consequently, SWAPO regarded the armed struggle as the ultimate means to fight for liberation. Modelled on Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of South Africa's ANC, SWAPO established its own military wing, which was later known as People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). By late 1964, the first guerrilla units crossed from Zambia into South West Africa, though it was only on 26 August 1966, after South African special units had clashed with SWAPO soldiers in Ongulumbashe in northern Namibia, that SWAPO officially launched its guerrilla struggle.⁸⁰

This guerrilla struggle was of low intensity during the early years. Incidents of violence usually occurred in the north and in the Caprivi Strip, particularly at those places used by insurgents to enter Namibia.⁸¹ Nevertheless, it was of huge importance for SWAPO to demonstrate that it was active in Namibia, the territory that was to be liberated, in order for them to gain increasing international recognition. SWAPO finally succeeded in being recognised as "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people" by the UN in 1976.⁸² By the time the Portuguese left Angola, SWAPO was able to operate from bases in southern Angola and the importance of Botswana as a refugee pipeline diminished. SWAPO rejected all South African attempts to co-operate in dubious alliances of internal self-government, such as the elections of tribal councils according to the Odendaal Plan or the Turnhalle Conference so that, despite some not entirely unjustified allegations of human rights violations in the liberation struggle, it was able to present itself as non-collaborationist in the election campaign in 1989 as Namibia was about to obtain its independence.

Co-operation across the border

While public institutions, as has become clear from previous discussions, often rely on outside influences, individuals are considered to be less dependent in decision-making. One cannot assume that all refugees and freedom fighters from Namibia did ask for co-operation from the protectorate or the Republic of Botswana. Rather, the vast and sparsely populated territory of Botswana was an ideal place to move around undetected, at least compared to the other options that would have been possible,

⁷⁹ Cf. Ansprenger 1984: pp. 90 f.

⁸⁰ Cf. Dierks 2002: p. 238

⁸¹ Cf. Ansprenger 1975: p. 86

⁸² Cf. Harneit-Sievers 1985: p. 22

which were, theoretically, a sea route via Walvis Bay, or via South Africa, Angola and the Caprivi. The nature of Botswana's territory however, does not favour refugee movements. Thus it was of vital importance for Namibians going into exile to know that there was a strong Herero population across the border, which had been living there for decades. Having been forced to leave Namibia at various times during the period of German occupation and even before, these Ovaherero had settled in different parts of the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Botswana's Ovaherero

Many analysts of Botswana's history allude to the great tradition of Botswana's refugee policy. Since the Difaqane Wars in the beginning of the 19th century that had displaced the old communities of the Batswana, Botswana excelled as a host for refugees.⁸³ One of the largest ethnic groups that came into Botswana was the Ovaherero. This process began in the middle of the 19th century and consisted mainly of small communities of traders and hunters. Jan Bart Gewald mentions the report by the Swedish explorer, Karl Johan Andersson, of some Herero settlements near Lake Ngami in the 1850s.⁸⁴ Furthermore, we learn about a treaty of friendship between Sekgoma Letshlathebe I, Chief of the Batswana, to whom this western part of Botswana belonged, and Chief Samuel Maharero of the Ovaherero. As reported by Peter Katjavivi, this agreement was made in the late 19th century and allowed the Ovaherero to settle in the Tawana area of Ngamiland in the 1890s. They were not only helped by Letshlathebe, but also by Chief Khama III then chief of the Bangwato.⁸⁵ This points to the fact that when Ovaherero first entered Botswana, "it was the chiefs and not the British who granted them permission to settle."⁸⁶

A first major wave of refugees from Namibia was caused by the declaration of the German protectorate of South West Africa in 1884. This wave included Samuel Shepard's family whose members were employed as scribes and interpreters by the chiefs of Okavango. Their descendants later settled on a substantial piece of land along the Botletle River.⁸⁷ This first wave revealed a split within the Ovaherero, which became clearer when the Herero faction under Samuel Maharero fought alongside the Germans in the Mbenderu Khauas-Khoi War in 1896.⁸⁸ The Ovambanderu have often been called Eastern Herero and have, on occasions especially from the mid 20th century onwards, tried to draw a

⁸³ Cf. Sell 1989: p. 357

⁸⁴ Cf. Gewald 1994: p. 1

⁸⁵ Cf. Katjavivi 1986: p. 106

⁸⁶ Vivel 1977: p. 173

⁸⁷ Cf. Gewald 1999: p. 180

⁸⁸ Cf. Drechsler 1991: p. 43

line between themselves and the Ovaherero.⁸⁹ In the war of 1896 they were defeated. The followers of the Mbanderu and some of their allied Ovaherero fled from the German protectorate into Bechuanaland and settled in Sehitwa and Makakung in the north west of Lake Ngami.⁹⁰ These were small movements in comparison to the influx of Ovaherero in 1904 after the Herero–German War, which had left the Ova-



Fig. 5: Samuel Maharero (seated) and his family in exile in Groenfontein, Transvaal (South Africa), 1910s. Standing (centre) behind his father is his son Frederick Maharero

herero close to extinction. The majority of the Ovaherero perished miserably in the Omaheke Desert, but a substantial number⁹¹ managed, along with Samuel Maharero, to escape into Bechuanaland. These Ovaherero had asked for help from both the British and Chief Sekgoma Letsholathebe. Both of them helped to resettle the Herero in the Ghanzi District.⁹² The Batawana were also hostile to the Germans. The Ovaherero were thus received warmly by Sekgoma Letsholathebe and settled in Maun, Mamuno, Ghanzi, Makakung and Sehitwa. Initially, the Ovaherero were given cattle and each of their centres was headed by a headman or sub-headman.⁹³ In this way, they were granted a “substantial degree of autonomy.”⁹⁴

Although the desire to return to Namibia never ceased, the Ovaherero in western Botswana did begin to put down roots. Some of them had brought cattle with them and, as the Ovaherero are skilful cattle raisers, they soon became one of the richest communities in Botswana. The long-standing relationship between Letsholathebe and Maharero served as an important base to legitimise the Herero presence. Botswana’s Ovaherero kept in close touch with their Namibian compatriots.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, life was to become more

⁸⁹ Detailed accounts on the culture and the history of the Ovambanderu can be found in Sundermeier 1977.

⁹⁰ Cf. Katjavivi 1986: p. 106

⁹¹ See also the accounts on the figures of the ‘genocide’.

⁹² Cf. Gewald 1999: p. 212

⁹³ Cf. Katjavivi 1986: p. 110

⁹⁴ Murray 1987: p. 112

⁹⁵ Cf. Ibid.: p. 114

difficult shortly after the resettlement. With the complete co-operation of the British authorities, labour recruiters from WENELA came to Ngamiland in search of labourers for the mines on the Witwatersrand among the Ovaherero. Clearly, the Ovaherero did not realise the implications of the situation and many of them began to work within the



Fig. 6: Two contract workers and the sister of the local headman at home in the Mbanderu settlement at Ncwe-le-tau (Botswana) in 1953

exploitative contract workers' system in South Africa; others were taken by force.⁹⁶ William Beinart reports that the system of not telling potential labourers the whole truth when recruiting them to become contract workers was a practice also exercised by the German authorities in South West Africa, when recruiting Africans and Coloureds from the Cape in order to build the railway lines in the German colony.⁹⁷ A group led by Samuel Maharero, comprising about 250 Ovaherero, who were previously living in Tsau, now settled in the Transvaal in 1907 where they lived under desperate conditions.⁹⁸ Only in 1919 did Maherero and his people settle in Mahalapye, which was part

of the Bangwato Reserve, where close contact between Tshekedi Khama and Samuel's son Frederick developed. By that time other Ovaherero had settled in eastern Botswana. By and large they had been welcomed by the Bangwato and other tribes and settled mainly in Serowe, Mahalapye, Gabane and Lobatse.⁹⁹

The Ovaherero who had remained in Ngamiland suffered another stroke of fate. In 1906 Sekgoma Letsholathebe was overthrown as chief of the Batawana in a coup supported by colonial officials of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Under the new chief, Mathiba, life became more difficult for both Ovaherero and Ovambanderu. In 1916 a petition by the Ovambanderu asking to return to South West Africa was rejected. They were allowed to move to Kavimba, a small place on the border of

⁹⁶ Cf. Gewald 1999: pp. 180–181

⁹⁷ Cf. Beinart 1987: p. 170

⁹⁸ Cf. Pool 1991: pp. 282–285

⁹⁹ Cf. Katjavivi 1986.: p. 113

South West Africa where Sekgoma was living in exile.¹⁰⁰ Other Ovaherero, however, chose to stay where they were or sought work on newly established Boer farms in the Ghanzi district.¹⁰¹

Samuel Maharero's role in the events of the Ovaherero in exile is not quite clear. Many commentators attribute the strong cohesion among the Ovaherero in Botswana to the fact of his presence in Botswana. Viveló, however, asserts that the Ovaherero in South West Africa never had a paramount chief. He suggests that it was only because the Europeans needed someone with whom to negotiate, they simply declared Samuel Maharero as paramount chief. In reality, Maharero could thus not have been paramount chief.¹⁰² In his biography, Gerhard Pool describes Maharero's status as that of an "ordinary person"¹⁰³ in Bechuanaland. In any event, Maharero did live in Khama's territory until his death in 1923. Khama had provided the Ovaherero with tracts of land near to Mahalapye, thus initiating a centralising process as the Ovaherero, scattered in the southern districts of the protectorate, began to move to Mahalapye.¹⁰⁴ The Ovaherero in Mahalapye enjoyed a privileged status in comparison to other minority tribes. Kebonang ascribes this mainly to the tribe's "willingness to accept Bangwato overlordship."¹⁰⁵

These events did not please the Ovaherero in western Botswana who were not satisfied with the degree of autonomy provided for them. In the 1930s and 1940s the Batawana state was no longer as strong as before, hence it became a "scene of separatist protest and a struggle for political rights."¹⁰⁶ In fact, it was not only the Ovaherero who were pressing for more rights, the Bayei, another non-Tswana group in Ngamiland, too demanded self-government. Supported by the British, the Batawana made efforts to suppress these minorities. While the British constantly argued that there was not sufficient land, the Ova-

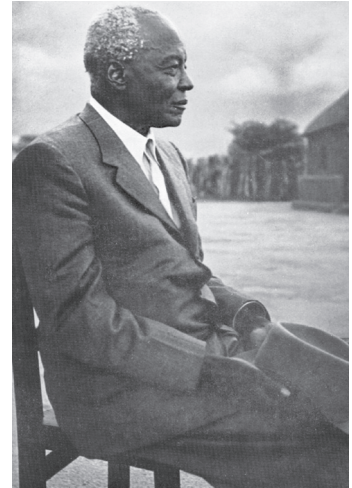


Fig. 7: Frederick Maharero

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Gewald 1999: p. 214

¹⁰¹ Cf. Gewald 1994: p. 15

¹⁰² Cf. Viveló 1977: pp. 146–147

¹⁰³ Pool 1991: p. 282

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Gewald 1999: p. 276 (footnote)

¹⁰⁵ Kebonang 1984: p. 8

¹⁰⁶ Murray 1987: p. 110

herero who were characterised as “semi-sedentary”¹⁰⁷ started to campaign against Batawana control. The constant friction over cattle between Herero and Tawana increased. In a petition in 1946, the Ovaherero in Botswana demanded to break away from the Batawana and return to South West Africa. Eventually, the Bayei were at least granted their own kgotla, a tribal assembly to which only Batswana had previously been entitled.¹⁰⁸

Co-operation in an international context

While tensions between the Ovaherero and Batawana grew, events in the international context favoured close co-operation between them. After the end of the Second World War, the status of South West Africa had to be discussed afresh. After the German defeat in 1915, South West Africa had been ruled under martial law until it was placed under the Trusteeship System of the League of Nations as a “C” Mandate, administered by South Africa.¹⁰⁹ After the Second World War when South Africa attempted to incorporate South West Africa as her fifth province, Ovaherero on both sides of the border who were in fear of further marginalisation and discrimination, came to the conclusion that it was essential to petition the newly founded United Nations in an effort to prevent the incorporation of Namibia into the South African Union. Communication was difficult in those days and, as the Ovaherero were restricted to their reserves, co-ordination between the Ovaherero in the various tribal reserves was only made possible through the help of the Anglican Reverend Michael Scott who had come to Bechuanaland to see Frederick Maharero. At that time Maharero was staying with Tshekedi Khama and the Bangwato. They had established contact with Scott and his people in October 1946. Scott acted on behalf of the Namibian Ovaherero, who hoped that their relatives across the border would support them in the fight against incorporation. After any confusion had been cleared up during Scott’s short return to Namibia afterwards, the Ovaherero in Bechuanaland drew up a petition to the UN Trusteeship Council, which Scott took with him to Namibia where it was signed by the Ovaherero in Gobabis, Windhoek and Okahandja.

On 26 November 1949, Michael Scott was finally allowed to speak at the United Nations, although it was still going to take some time before his efforts would draw more international attention onto Namibia. Scott’s overseas flight had been paid for by the Ovaherero in Bechuanaland¹¹⁰ – a clear sign of the strong coherence among the Ovaherero. This strong coherence leads to the assumption that the Herero networks might have played a vital role when Namibians, Ovaherero in particular, left their country via

¹⁰⁷ Viveló 1977: p. 72

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Murray 1987: p. 121

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Troup 1950: p. 58

¹¹⁰ Cf. Scott 1958: p. 245

Botswana in the days of the liberation struggle. The possible long-term consequences of this coherence will therefore be assessed below.

It was not only the Ovaherero that demanded greater international attention for the fate of the Namibian people, the Batswana in Bechuanaland were very much aware of the possible consequences that Namibia's incorporation into the Union could have for the future of Bechuanaland. In the opinion of the leading chiefs of the protectorate free access to the African west coast was absolutely essential for the future development of Bechuanaland. This access could not be guaranteed under South African occupation. Besides, the Batswana chiefs feared that the incorporation of South West Africa could be a first step towards the ultimate incorporation of the High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland, Basotholand and Swaziland. Consequently, they strongly objected to this South African move.

Representing five other chiefs, Tshekedi Khama had been about to approach the British government in 1946 hoping to convince them to reject the incorporation of the mandated territory of South West Africa into the Union. However, the Tswana chiefs were unsuccessful in their endeavours. Tshekedi was barred from travelling to Britain since there were no Tswana interests involved in the case of South West Africa.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, it becomes clear that this effort was another early sign of co-operation between the African people in their struggle for independence on both sides of the Botswana–Namibian border.

¹¹¹ Cf. Khama 1946: pp. 1–5 and Crowder 1987: p. 62

3 Methodology

Archival studies

As mentioned above, conventional sources of literature available for this research were limited. There are, however, numerous written sources that did provide useful information and were thoroughly studied namely, documents in the British National Archives from colonial times and from the Botswana National Archives since independence. Dealing with a historic topic this does not seem surprising, however, the variety of different sources covered a wide range of events that proved useful for this particular research.

British National Archives

The British National Archives in the London suburb of Kew are characterised as an outstanding organisation. All documents can be found in a digital catalogue that guarantees the researcher easy access. It was apparent that the documents found their way into the archives almost immediately after they had been written, although thirty years had to elapse before these became available to researchers. Of course, dealing with the period of the protectorate, this did not pose a problem at all.

The Bechuanaland Protectorate period is, with few exceptions, very well documented. Useful information could be found in files from the Colonial Office, the Foreign Office, the Commonwealth Relations Office and in the correspondence of the High, Resident and District Commissioners. British correspondence with South Africa was available, too, and gave good insight into the relations with Pretoria. Additionally, it proved worthwhile to take a close look at the intelligence reports, which had been composed by the Special Branch of the police¹ and which documented many of the refugee movements in the protectorate as well as the activities of the developing political parties.

Botswana National Archives

In Botswana the holdback period is twenty years. This means that all documents up to 1988 were available at the time of research. The staff of the Botswana National Archives in Gaborone was most helpful and the catalogues are clearly arranged and provide the researcher with a good overview. Access to documents in the Botswana National Archives requires a Research Permit issued by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. For this reason, an application in advance is useful.

¹ Cf. Interview with Archibald Mogwe, 22.7.08

Almost all the documents that are of importance for this research are found in the files from the Office of the President. This may sound a bit strange at first; however, as laid down by the Refugee Recognition and Control Act 1967, the final decision on the refugees' application was conferred by the Minister of State who worked in the Office of the President. Besides detailed protocols of the Refugee Advisory Committees, the files from the Office of the President contain minutes of meetings, which concerned the handling of the liberation movements in Botswana, refugee and immigration laws, and general information on the liberation movements collected by Botswana authorities.

Interviews

Oral history

While the availability of a good variety of sources in the archives in London and Gaborone undoubtedly contributed significantly to the research, it was still necessary to verify, deepen and amplify the obtained insights. This was done by conducting oral history interviews. As the name indicates oral history is a method, which was introduced and is used mainly by historians. However, as this book deals with a historic topic in a political context, there should be no doubt that oral history interviews add significantly to the work; nor is it any longer a "conservation area"²² solely reserved for historians.

Oral history creates an opportunity to obtain information in areas of study that would otherwise be difficult to research. Documents from the archives usually cover only certain aspects of a topic, often neglecting those that have not made "big history" as such. Consequently, one of the main objectives of oral history is not only to give a voice to those who spoke out during their lifetime, but also to include the stories of those that have been marginalised due to political developments or simply due to one-sided coverage of political and historic events. Larson calls this "empowerment of the participants",³³ although she admits that in many cases oral history is used because there is simply no other way to get hold of certain information. As a major aim of my research is to reduce the neglect of certain aspects of the Namibian liberation struggle, oral history qualifies as a reasonable method. Fortunately quite a few contemporary witnesses from the period covered were still available for interview, whereas obviously for researchers on the French Revolution oral history interviews would not be a viable option. Oral history interviews can be regarded as interviews with those who were directly involved in historic processes and aim

² Niethammer 1980: p. 19

³ Larson 2008: p. 129

at a better understanding of the more informal decision-making structures within organisations and groups.⁴ Niethammer calls an oral history interview an interview which is a

depth drilling into the past to tap knowledge about living conditions and patterns of thought and behaviour of the past while trying to maximize the neutralisation of the procedure of tradition of memory.⁵

This definition includes a first hint at the difficulties a researcher making use of oral history interviews faces when aiming at the utmost objectivity, for it is undoubtedly probable that interview partners lack the needed neutrality. Despite this concern, Frisch refers to oral history as

a powerful tool for discovering, exploring and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory – how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context and how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them.⁶

From this definition one can conclude that, even though stories and experiences are being told from a very personal point of view, there is still a certain content that can be valuable to the researcher. Critics of oral history argue that oral historians always think that every personal account could be transformed into a purposeful story. Oral historians would tend to look for threads where there are none.⁷ Special attention needs to be paid to what is being told and how far the interpretation takes it while analysing the outcome of the interviews, in order to avoid accusations of a lack of neutrality.

Trevor Lummis points to the fact that oral sources can never be objective as such, rather they constitute a great potential source that would be lost eventually if it was not used.⁸ After all the researcher simply has to work with the sources available. The personal involvement of the interviewees might make up for the lack of accuracy and besides, one can argue that even written documents originate from some kind of oral sources⁹ – probably recorded with a much smaller time difference, but still cautioning the researcher to examine the content carefully.

⁴ Cf. Niethammer 1980: p. 8 f.

⁵ Ibid.: p. 21

⁶ Frisch 1990: p. 188

⁷ Cf. Hamilton/Shopes 2008: p. 9

⁸ Cf. Lummis 1998: p. 255

⁹ Cf. Portelli 1998: p. 37

Selection of interviewees

The main question one is concerned with when deciding which people to interview is: What information will I get from whom? For this research it is evident that most dialogue partners are found in Namibia. Nevertheless, it proved useful to speak to former representatives of both the Botswana government and those from opposition parties in Botswana. Additionally, since a close look at the Herero communities in Botswana was planned, interviews with people from these communities helped to enrich the research. Documents from the archives often gave an indication as to whom to contact. In Namibia, those who left Namibia via Bechuanaland or Botswana for exile during the liberation struggle were the main contacts. As Larson pointed out, attempts should be made to keep the interviews as representative as possible.¹⁰ Witnesses from different liberation movements and from different ethnic backgrounds who fled in different years were therefore all interviewed. Snowball sampling, though less representative, often turned out to be effective as well because the network of former freedom fighters, especially from the same liberation movement, still seems to work efficiently.

Most people were easily approachable. Even those holding high office in the governments of Namibia or Botswana were prepared to be interviewed. In other cases it was more difficult to make contact with certain people, either because they were living in rural areas, or there was some uncertainty as to whether they were still alive. Another difficulty I confronted when dealing with people from the Herero groups was my German background. It became evident that feelings of German colonial guilt is still present among those communities; these prejudices created a delicate situation affecting my encounters with this group of interviewees. In many instances I was tracked into the reparation debate¹¹ which, however, proved to be fruitful for both sides. With one exception all the 95 interviews were recorded digitally.

Design of the interviews

Thorough preparation of the interviews is essential. This not only serves the purpose of being able to enquire in a more competent way, it helps to underline the seriousness of the research when speaking with the various contacts. Furthermore, the chances of being lied to are reduced to a minimum. In rare cases I was still presented with evident untruths, but in general I was, at least according to my judgement, dealing with genuine and

¹⁰ Cf. Larson 2008: p. 124

¹¹ The Ovaherero are trying to get material compensation for the partial extinction of their forefathers from the government of the Federal Republic of Germany. The German government, however, rejects these reparation claims and is not willing to negotiate on this matter.

honest interview partners. Kohler Riessmann points to the difficulties that emerge while conducting an interview, though asserts that this research method is justified by looking at what can actually be learned from the interviews:

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they *are* revealing truths.¹²

She regards these truths as “truths of experience”¹³ that still need interpretation, but remains convinced that much information could still be filtered from the interviews.

In principle, oral history interviews can be regarded as narrative interviews.¹⁴ In narrative interviews the researcher is presented with experiences in touch with reality, but with subjective testimonies about occurrences. The evidence given by the interviewee is unstructured but by putting his experience into narrative terms, he is forced to give a certain shape to his elaborations that focuses on the main points. One can usually distinguish between three phases: At first the interviewer presents his counterpart with an incentive in order to encourage him talk about certain issues or events. In the second phase the interviewee should talk as freely as he can without being interrupted. Only in the third phase can the interviewer go into detail and clarify certain issues of the statement.¹⁵

In practice, however, the interviews assume different shapes mainly due to great differences in the narrative competence of the interview partners. Some were able to elaborate on their flight from Namibia in a very detailed way, whereas others preferred to be guided by further questions. Due to the circumstances of the interview, it remains possible for the interviewer to assume a more active role during an oral history interview in order to give the interview the planned structure.¹⁶ When making enquiries in the third phase of the interview, the researcher should try to avoid asking leading questions. Although this principle was accepted, it could not always be followed due to the complex interview situations.

Notwithstanding these methodological difficulties, the interviews proved to be very efficient. Furthermore, even on the rare exceptions of rather inefficient interviews, Starr provides an alternative view. He emphasises that some authors hold the view that even interviews that appear to be weak can contribute to the research topic:

even an abysmally poor interview usually holds some valuable information, even if the very “Mister X” has a very verbose style, was the slave of Scotch or talks in a way reminiscent of P.T. Barum.¹⁷

¹² Kohler Riessmann 1993: p. 22

¹³ Ibid.: p. 22

¹⁴ Cf. Grele 2008: p. 67

¹⁵ Cf. Schütze 1977: pp. 36 ff.

¹⁶ R.J. Grele 1985: p. 205

¹⁷ Starr 1980: p. 42

In general, “abysmally poor interviews” did not take place. In one instance I had to deal with a heavily primed interview partner, which made obtaining information a very slow process.

Evaluation of the interviews

In oral history a transcription of the interview only takes place after it has been completed. The interviewer does not aim at including every laugh or smile or emotion. Still, challenges remain in the transcription process. Kohler Riessmann comments that the process of transcribing the interview is “incomplete, partial and selective.”¹⁸ This certainly arouses criticism, but I would argue that any interpretation is somehow partial by definition. However, one should take care to reflect whether the interviewee wants to convey a certain thesis or whether he gives an account as accurately and as neutrally as he or she can. Additionally, the interviewer has to bear in mind that current political conflicts may flow into the interviewees’ statements. In current Namibian politics, for example, former SWAPO members who have now joined the Congress of Democrats (CoD) or the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), might not tell the same story about certain critical issues as former freedom fighters who have remained loyal to SWAPO. The same applies to quarrels between different sections of the Herero community, who now support NUDO, the DTA or SWAPO.

Although oral history does not necessarily require a hermeneutic analysis due to the focus on the extraction of facts and coherence, it should still be the aim to construe the elaborations and their meaning against the contemporary and personal background of the interviewee. While doing this as much information as possible must be available about the interview partner, as well as the historic background of the issue or event that is being talked about.

In the case of this particular research, I had developed a clear sense about the developments told to me by my interview partners. Very often verification or an advancement of theses was possible and could be measured against the information from the archives and from the literature. Although doubts about the method of oral history remain, it proved vital for this particular book and gave many insights that would otherwise have been lost.

¹⁸ Kohler Riessmann 1993: p. 11

4 Government Attitude

We will come to see that major guidelines on the treatment of refugees and freedom fighters in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana constituted a solid foundation from which neither the government in Mafikeng, nor later the one in Gaborone, deviated as long as they were able to reinforce them. These guidelines became common knowledge among liberation movements as well as among those people in Bechuanaland and Botswana that were somehow concerned with the refugee and the liberation issue. It is therefore unavoidable to depict the general approach of this delicate matter at the beginning of this chapter. It influenced legislation and Botswana's co-operation with partners such as neighbouring countries and multilateral organisations. In this chapter various instances are described that illustrate the attitude of the independent and the protectorate governments during the Namibian liberation struggle. Most importantly, as has already become apparent (see above), Bechuanaland's and Botswana's relations to South Africa posed a major factor. Consequently, this chapter examines the relationship between the two countries that has been identified as one existing between dependence and interdependence, but undoubtedly possessing an asymmetrical character that questioned Botswana's room for manoeuvre both in general and in its handling of the liberation movements.

General policies in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana

General refugee policy

Prior to the Portuguese Revolution the route through Botswana was almost inevitable for Namibian freedom fighters and refugees seeking to leave their home country to join the liberation struggle, or to obtain further education. This, of course, made it necessary for the protectorate government and consequently for the independent government in Gaborone to develop guidelines on dealing with this great influx of foreigners. These guidelines ultimately resulted in the adoption of laws to regulate the refugee traffic that will be looked at in this chapter. Certainly Namibians never posed as great a threat to Botswana's security as South African and Zimbabwean freedom fighters. Compared to South Africans, Zimbabweans and Angolans, Namibians in Botswana were small in number during the days of the liberation struggle in southern Africa. But once certain guidelines in terms of refugee and immigration legislation had been established, these naturally applied to all people using Botswana as a temporary stopover on their way into exile.

Once the liberation struggle in southern Africa started to gain momentum, British officials in the Bechuanaland Protectorate were virtually caught by surprise. On the one hand, they had always treated their protectorate with great negligence and had, with the exception of keeping an eye on their southern neighbour in Pretoria, never paid much attention to developments in the surrounding countries.¹ On the other hand, the need for comprehensive legislation regulating refugee traffic or the handling of freedom fighters had simply never arisen. With the development of the armed struggle in the southern African territories, it became clear that maintaining impartiality towards the adversaries was no longer possible despite the stated British aim expressed in 1963:

In dealing with South African refugees we have [...] consistently tried to remain neutral, neither helping, nor hindering refugees, but enforcing our own plan [...] with regard both to the High Commission Territories' dependence on the Republic and to the public opinion in the territories and in the outside world.²

Keeping in mind that Bechuanaland was administered from Mafikeng in South Africa (even the High Commissioner often depended on directives from London), it is not difficult to imagine that British reaction was slow when suddenly faced with an influx of refugees and freedom fighters from neighbouring territories. This is why Britain's measures concerning the refugee traffic, which increased dramatically with the occurrence of mass violence in the Old Location in South West Africa in December 1959 and in the South African township of Sharpeville in March 1960,³ were limited to two main principles later also adopted by the independent government of the Republic of Botswana.

Firstly, it was agreed that the protectorate would accept genuine political refugees. After all the territory had excelled as a good host of refugees especially, as has already been referred to, at earlier stages in the Namibian liberation struggle. Although this position allowed a wide range of interpretation as to what was considered as "genuine" and as "political", it was clear that this meant a distinctive category that did not include criminals fleeing their country in fear of prosecution. The only relevant guideline the British could follow was that laid down by the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which had been adopted on 28 July 1951. It defined the term "refugee" as a person who

[...] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country

¹ Cf. Dale 1985: p. 225

² Cf. British National Archives, FO 371/167545, 955, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Sir R. Black, 12.9.63

³ Cf. Gibson 1972: p. 56 f. and 122 f.

of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.⁴

This convention offered a wide range of reasons for which the British could accept people fleeing from Bechuanaland's neighbouring countries as refugees. It would later become the basis of the British definition of the term "refugee" in the Immigration Law of 1963 that will be analysed in detail (below). While the ANC was banned in South Africa in 1960, SWAPO, SWANU, nor any other liberation movement faced similar constraints in South West Africa. Nevertheless, this did not mean that SWAPO or SWANU could hold meetings, rallies and campaign freely. Members of these organisations were harassed and lived in constant fear of arbitrary arrest by the South West African Police. Therefore they should easily have fallen under the category of "membership of a particular social group or political opinion" as was the case of their South African counterparts. In cases where refugees turned out not to be "genuine political" ones, it was British policy not to allow them to be returned to the Republic unless their free passage and physical integrity were guaranteed.

It was therefore not all that clear what it meant to be a political refugee, nor what kind of offence had led the respective refugees to leave their countries, and whether this was of a "political character". The main problem the British faced was that almost all Namibian and South African refugees had left their country without proper documentation. Consequently, the question arose whether the crime of leaving South or South West Africa "without valid travel documents" already constituted a political offence. After all it could be argued that fleeing the country was in fact a political gesture. Yet, an agreement was reached that only "fleeing from persecution" made the exiles "genuine political refugees".⁵ When the BDP government took over after independence in 1966, it continued the policy of general acceptance of refugees. Government officials rightly referred to the country's "porous boundaries"⁶ as making it inevitable to follow this strategy. Even referring to a later stage of the liberation struggle, BZ Osei-Hwedie observed a "great discrepancy between official policy and what transpired in reality".⁷ She alluded to the difficulties independent Botswana faced when attempting to implement refugee policies – an indication of deficiencies in exercising full sovereignty.

Then again there was a great amount of sympathy for the fellow Africans involved in the liberation struggle.⁸ The following subsections examine how these considerations influenced legislation in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana. Before that we

⁴ Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951: Art. 1 (2)

⁵ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 129 B, W.B.L. Monson to Mr Steel, 1.4.64

⁶ Interview with Archibald Mogwe, 22.7.08

⁷ Osei-Hwedie 1998: p. 425

⁸ Cf. Interview with Daniel Kwelagobe, 26.6.08

look at the second guiding principle concerning refugee treatment that proved to be more unambiguous throughout the Namibian liberation struggle.

General policy towards the liberation movements

In a study of African policy towards the liberation movements, Vincent Khapoya develops a scale of nine different dimensions of support for African liberation movements. He looks at the whole range of actions an African country could potentially undertake to assist freedom fighters from fellow African countries and asserts that the granting of political asylum and the general admission of refugees are among those measures that can be implemented reasonably easily by independent African governments. Khapoya argues that the question of generally allowing refugees to enter the territory fittingly reflects the attitude of the respective governments towards the liberation struggle. He points to the fact that the granting of political asylum might not be as safe as it is thought to be (and in fact Botswana might just be a case in point). As has already been shown, these first two possibilities of support have been exhausted both by the British protectorate government and independent Botswana. While four of the dimensions developed by Khapoya deal with the contributions to the African Liberation Committee of the OAU (that will be considered later in this chapter), two variables refer to more overt support for the liberation movements.⁹ Both the British and the Botswana government made it very clear that any military action on Botswana territory, be it in order to attack a neighbouring territory, or the establishment of a military camp or base, was unthinkable.¹⁰ This aspect has already been dealt with in various studies on Botswana's policy-making (cf. chapter 1, p. 1 ff.), as it represents a distinctive difference to the attitude of African countries located further away from the turmoil in the south of the continent. It can therefore easily be concluded that the support Khapoya refers to i.e. the provision of bases, camps and training facilities, was not an option for Botswana.

The determination in both the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana not to allow any military activity was quite clearly their fear of facing fierce South African reaction. Protectorate officials and the government in Gaborone adopted a subordinate role to the hegemon in the south whose power was overwhelming. Initially, as has been indicated, Botswana did not completely disapprove of the use of violence by the liberation movements,¹¹ but the realistic stance that was adopted in Mafikeng and Gaborone did not leave any other option.

⁹ Cf. Khapoya 1974–75: p. 26

¹⁰ Cf. Interview with Daniel Kwelagobe, 26.6.08

¹¹ Cf. Chapter 1: Current Research. An Overview, p. 1 ff.

Khapoya, however, mentions the option of offering the liberation movements the opportunity to operate from a field office. This is meant in a strictly non-military way, but can still be seen as more than covert assistance. Through the years of the liberation struggle in southern Africa a number of liberation movements opened an office in Botswana, SWAPO among them.¹² This is a clear indication that there was a great amount of willingness to support the liberation movements. At the same time, neither the government of the protectorate, nor the leaders of the Republic of Botswana ever departed from their principle of not allowing the use of force on their territory.

Immigration and refugee legislation

Bechuanaland Protectorate

Many instances illustrate that the treatment of refugees in the Bechuanaland Protectorate did not follow a rigidly systematic approach. While in general the British attitude was perceived as liberal, some former refugees recall that they were imprisoned by the British without proper explanation.¹³ Imprisonment was often a consequence of the lack of proper documentation which, as will be explained later, posed a problem during the early days of refugee movements through Botswana. On the other hand, British neglect of the protectorate became apparent with regard to the refugee issue. On various occasions Namibian freedom fighters hardly encountered any British personnel in the protectorate at all.¹⁴ Protectorate officials realised the need for more control to be exercised over the refugee movements. Even in 1965 the situation was correctly characterised:

The fact that [...] undesirable persons can so easily outstay their welcome, and abuse the hospitality extended to them as so-called “refugees”, serves better than any other example to demonstrate clearly the existent farcical situation whereby the government is apparently powerless to exert its authority and get rid of them.¹⁵

The main objective at this stage was simply to cope with the situation and prevent it from getting out of hand.

In general, however, living in the Bechuanaland Protectorate was quite a new experience for many Namibians. It was in this British territory where they learned for the first time that black and white could interact in a friendly and non-discriminatory way.

¹² Cf. e.g. Interview with Helmut Angula, 25.9.08

¹³ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Nickey Iyambo, 7.10.08, with Phillemon Kanime, 13.10.08 or Haimbodi ya-Nambinga Kati, 12.9.08

¹⁴ Cf. Interview with Nahas Angula, 13.8.08

¹⁵ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/32, Letter to the High Commissioner, 25.3.65

The description given by Dr. Nickey Iyambo, who crossed the border in early 1964, appears revealing:

When we crossed the border into that village the British colonial police [...] were asking questions nicely. They said that if we wanted to go we would have to wait for a permit. That could not have happened in South West Africa. You would have answered these questions in chains or after you had been beaten [...]¹⁶

The term “refugee” has always been problematic in that it is difficult to use the term without ambiguity. It was only in 1961 that the British applied the definition contained in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees to the southern African territories. Prior to that, they were guided by UK policy as recorded in the House of Commons on 8 March 1957, which calls for a very clear motive for leaving the home country in order to be granted refugee status. It is stated explicitly that:

[...] we do not regard as eligible those people who wish to come to this country simply because they do not like the regime under which they are living [...]¹⁷

This clearly reflects the concern that too broad a definition of the term “refugee” might encourage potential asylum seekers to enter the United Kingdom in large numbers. Admittedly, this served mainly as a guiding principle for the British when developing legislation for their African territories. It was otherwise only applied in the UK itself. The severity of this definition was softened by the amendment that acceptance would not be declined if the applicant would “face danger to his life or liberty”¹⁸ on being returned home.

Although the British strongly proclaimed the non-racial bias of their policies, reality occasionally drew a different picture. An example is the immigration legislation that was partly reformulated in 1958 with the introduction of the African Immigration Proclamation. This was directed at Africans wanting to enter the territory of the protectorate. Asked about the distinction between Africans and Non-Africans by a British Member of Parliament, the protectorate officials responded that the proclamation had been introduced with the consent of the African Advisory Council “in the interests of the African inhabitants of the territory”.¹⁹ The African Immigration Proclamation provided the African authority (i.e. the traditional leaders who had been granted a certain amount of freedom within the system of British indirect rule) with a substantial voice in deciding whether to allow an African immigrant into the territory. The British claimed that the African authorities were likely to be more knowledgeable about the circumstances and needs

¹⁶ Interview with Nickey Iyambo 7.10.08

¹⁷ British National Archives, CO 1048/919, 14, Osborne to Campbell, 24.5.66

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ British National Archives, DO 35/7359, Proclamation No. 9

of their areas. Besides which, they should have proper control over the entry of African people into the Bechuanaland Protectorate.²⁰

While this might be suggestive of a liberal handling of refugee policies by the British, it can be assumed that with this arrangement the British could kill two, if not three birds with one stone. Firstly, the British could demonstrate that at a stage when there was still no constitutional change towards the eventual independence of Botswana, they allowed the Africans to have an important say in policy matters. At the same time, the British made sure that the influx of African immigrants was limited because they could assume that the traditional leaders of the Batswana would handle the immigration issue in a rather conservative way in order to make sure that their territories, which had been scaled down by their colonial rulers, were not becoming overpopulated. A third point that could be raised is that by promulgating a law that was specifically referring to Africans, the British might have hoped to appease the regime in Pretoria, for South Africa knew only racial laws in many areas of society.

The Proclamation itself emphasised that entry into the Bechuanaland Protectorate was not permitted for Africans without a “Permit for Permanent Residence, a Permit for Temporary Residence or a travel document.”²¹ If the immigrant had been in possession of one of these documents it would have been mainly up to the respective African Authorities and District Commissioners to decide on whether he or she would be allowed to remain. This decision was supposed to be based on

the economic conditions of the Tribal Territory and the Territory, the advisability of increasing the number of residents [...] and the ability of the applicant to subsist without detriment to the existing population²²

The problem of documentation would later become crucial with the arrival of refugees. It was not the intention of Pretoria to issue members of SWAPO or the ANC with travel documents enabling them to leave the country to join the liberation struggle abroad. In fact, many prospective freedom fighters tried to obtain a passport under the guise of going to school abroad or visiting relatives. The South African authorities usually declined their applications.²³ As a natural consequence, most of the refugees and freedom fighters arrived in Botswana without being able to identify themselves. The following chapters will show how this problem was dealt with in practice.

²⁰ Cf. Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Cf. Interview with Festus Muundjua, 22.8.08

The proclamation also deals with the classification of prohibited immigrants. This classification, however, was done in a vague fashion that allowed for great scope in interpretation. Amongst others, it identified those Africans as prohibited immigrants who were

deemed by the Resident Commissioner with the approval of the High Commissioner on economic grounds or on account of the standard or habits of life to be an undesirable inhabitant or class of inhabitant [...]²⁴

Prohibited immigrants were requested to leave the territory of the protectorate immediately. If they did not, they would ultimately have to face deportation.

In 1960 an amendment to the African Immigration Proclamation was introduced, which provided for the issuance of a “High Commissioner’s Special Permit”. This permit virtually handed the refugee over to the mercy of the High Commissioner who could issue such permits in “his absolute discretion”.²⁵ This amendment rendered it possible for the High Commissioner to allow refugees to remain in the protectorate even if the African Authority had refused them temporary residence. This process thereby limited the powers of traditional leaders and provided a mechanism to solve potential conflicts arising out of domestic dissent.

Neither the proclamation of 1958 nor its amendment two years later looked into the matter of defining the term “refugee”. Driven by the increasing influx of refugees from neighbouring territories, the government of the protectorate was obliged to produce more comprehensive legislation to ensure that the officials of the protectorate did not have to deal with the refugee matter from a precarious legal basis. Notwithstanding the lack of definition of the term “refugee” (the definition of the UN Refugee Convention had already been adopted in 1961 by the southern African territories), the Immigration Law of 1963 was compelled to elaborate further on what had already been outlined in the African Immigration Proclamation in 1958. It once again had its focus on immigration in general and the declaration of prohibited immigrants. Special attention should therefore be paid to the changes this new law brought about compared to the proclamation of 1958. Naturally the new law catered for all immigrants, not only Africans, but this is a marginal aspect for we are dealing with a matter that almost exclusively involved Africans.

The Immigration Law of 1963 certainly removed a large part of the arbitrariness of the treatment the refugees received under the African Authorities and various commissioners. The new legislation provided for the establishment of an Immigrants Selection Board composed of the Chief Immigration Officer and up to four members appointed by the

²⁴ British National Archives, DO 35/732, Proclamation No. 9

²⁵ Ibid.

High Commissioner. This board would decide on the application of the immigrants by ordinary resolution.²⁶ When reaching a decision on the individual cases, members of the board were expected to be guided by the applicant's character, his "qualifications, education, training and experience", the ability to "support himself" and the "interest of the territory".²⁷ Evidently it was the aim of the legislator – in fact at that stage the Legislative Council had a say as well – to ensure that no inconvenience should be caused by the presence of the refugees and, additionally, try to benefit from their stay. If an application was looked upon favourably, a residence permit could be issued which would not exceed three years but which could be renewed thereafter and which imposed certain conditions on the immigrant.²⁸ The practice of imposing restrictive conditions on the refugees was common in the Namibian case (see below) and led to many grievances among potential Namibian freedom fighters. Both the Selection Board and the High Commissioner were allowed to institute disciplinary measures against the immigrants even a complete withdrawal of the residence permit.²⁹

This law allowed for the immediate registration of the immigrants once they entered the territory of the protectorate. Although the law obliged the refugees and freedom fighters to report to the nearest immigration office, they often tried to proceed further into the interior of the country before presenting themselves to the authorities. This aspect will be looked at when dealing with the refugee routes, but it can be assumed that it was, at least partly, due to the vagueness of the legislation.

The vagueness of this legislation enabled the British to apply their practice of declaring all refugees who had left the territory prohibited immigrants.³⁰ This was usually done to make sure they would not return. It has been frequently emphasised that neither the British protectorate nor independent Botswana were keen to have a "build-up"³¹ of refugees they might not be able to control later. On the one hand, while this procedure cast British, allegedly liberal, colonial policies into doubt, it provoked a great deal of insecurity among the refugees concerning their status, in particular among SWAPO members. Although it was evident that protectorate officials could do little if prohibited immigrants tried to re-enter the territory, the British High Commission in Dar es Salaam was approached by SWAPO representatives for advice on how to regain access to the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1965. They had come to the conclusion that most of them were prohibited

²⁶ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/765, E/27/i, Bechuanaland Protectorate, Immigration Law 1963: Part III, 20.

²⁷ Ibid.: Part III, 21. (4)

²⁸ Cf. Ibid.: Part III, 21. (7)–(9)

²⁹ Cf. Ibid.: Part III, 22. (1)

³⁰ Cf. Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

³¹ Interview with Archibald Mogwe, 22.7.08

immigrants in Bechuanaland, or would be prohibited as soon as they made any move to enter the British territory.³² This complaint, however, did not change the British course of action nor did it undergo a distinct alteration once Botswana became independent. In fact, in a number of instances members of Namibian liberation movements were declared prohibited immigrants once they tried to re-enter Botswana, as in the case of Markus Kooper in 1966, or the former SWANU President Jariretundu Kozonguizi in 1970.³³ The increasing influx of refugees clearly demanded legal prerequisites in order to deal with the matter effectively. The Refugee Recognition and Control Act, which was proclaimed shortly after independence in 1967, was therefore already in progress in the dying days of the protectorate.

Botswana

When the new legislation was about to be introduced, the Khama government was informed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that it was not in accordance with the UN Convention of 1951 and had therefore to be partially adjusted.³⁴ Eventually the Refugee Recognition and Control Act provided for the first ever definition of the term “refugee” in the legislation of Botswana and the protectorate as her predecessor. To be precise, it dealt with the concept of political refugees thereby adopting the definition of the UN Convention.³⁵ It substantially altered refugee proceedings in Botswana when it came into being on 28 April 1967 by providing for the establishment of Refugee Advisory Committees. These committees were to meet regularly to investigate the individual cases of foreigners claiming political asylum in Botswana. On the basis of the committee’s recommendations, the Minister of State would make a decision whether or not to grant the applicants refugee status.³⁶ Consequently Refugee Advisory Committees were established in Francistown, Ghanzi, Lobatse, Mochudi, Gaborone, Kasane, Maun and Serowe in 1968.³⁷ Usually the committees were composed of both government officials and renowned people in society such as tribal authorities or even experienced settlers. From reading the Committee Reports we can conclude that the committee took great

³² Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, British High Commissioner, Dar es Salaam to HR Hobden, CRO, 12.11.65

³³ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/12, Head of Special Branch to Senior Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, 26.5.66 and OP 55/22, Permanent Secretary to the President to Botswana High Commissioner, London, 6.10.70

³⁴ Cf. Dale 1995: p. 37

³⁵ Cf. Botswana National Archives, Refugee Recognition and Control Act 1967, “SCHEDULE” (Section 2)

³⁶ Cf. Botswana National Archives, Refugee Recognition and Control Act 1967, Part II, 4.

³⁷ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/42, Permanent Secretary to the President to Attorney General’s Chambers, 23.2.68

care to investigate every single case and normally gave the immigrants a chance to present their cases. Committee members were, however, anxious to recommend that political asylum only be given to those refugees who were found to have some political affiliation and whose behaviour was fitting enough to be recognised.³⁸ Sometimes the committee was overstretched in their efforts to reach a decision, especially in Francistown, which had become a hub for refugees from all southern African countries. Committee meetings therefore had to take place frequently.

Occasionally the treatment of immigrants by the Refugee Advisory Committees was not up to standard. Cases in which the intellectual capacity of the applicants seemed more than limited, were looked at with disrespect, which certainly did not contribute to a favourable atmosphere. However, there was general good will. As Philipp Steenkamp, one-time District Commissioner in Francistown and later working in the Office of the President, remembered:

There was a great deal of sympathy for people from those countries. Certainly our personal views were that anybody who came from South Africa had the right to get out of that place [...]³⁹

The then Assistant Minister in the Office of the President summarised Botswana's stance in a similar fashion:

When these people run from South Africa, they come through here and we give them political asylum. If they want to pass on to Zambia and other countries, we make sure they are not kidnapped on the way.⁴⁰

As further elaboration will show, it was difficult in many cases to deny that immigrants had left their country for political motives. The uncertainty that committee members experienced was often reflected in the reports of the committee. It was then up to the Minister of State to decide on the cases; he very often gave the refugees the benefit of the doubt and awarded refugee status to the immigrants. It cannot, however, be denied that the earlier category, the question of whether Botswana could benefit from a certain immigrant's presence, played a role as well. More than that though, there had to be assurances that once a refugee was accepted he would only use Botswana as a transit station before further arrangements were made. Considering the case of two SWAPO and three SWANU immigrants in a Cabinet Memorandum in November 1966 for example, the

³⁸ Cf. e.g. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/11 or 55/23, Reports on Refugees. On occasion immigrants presented themselves completely intoxicated before the committee. This would, of course, have meant automatic exclusion.

³⁹ Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

⁴⁰ Times of Zambia, 18.12.72

Minister of State advocated that the applicants should be given temporary residence permits because they were likely to get scholarships and “would be helped by party officials” to get to Dar es Salaam,⁴¹ where both SWAPO and SWANU had offices.

Prospective freedom fighters and refugees were, however, not always processed speedily. The holding of Refugee Advisory Committee Meetings, the hearing of all individual cases and the subsequent decision by the Minister of State involved a lot of bureaucracy and was time-consuming. While immigrants were awaiting their verdict, they often had to remain in some form of detention. Government correspondence suggests that the reasons for the imprisonment of immigrants whose cases had not been decided were twofold. Firstly, it was done out of bare necessity. Botswana’s authorities did not have the facilities to accommodate immigrants in places other than prisons.⁴² The protectorate authorities had already been forced to take this step and, later, Botswana was unable to find alternatives until the establishment of the refugee camp at Dukwe in the late seventies. Most Namibian freedom fighters who were accommodated in prison confirmed that they were only locked up at night, moving around freely during day time.⁴³ In some instances Namibians were kept in various prisons as they moved on from Ghanzi to Francistown. They were then kept in prison in Ghanzi, Maun and Francistown. This is why the Director of Prisons had to inform the Private Secretary to the President about the imprisonment conditions of the refugees after receiving a complaint from the Botswana Council for Refugees in October 1976. The Director explained that the refugees “have always been accommodated separately away from the convicted and remand prisoners. They are not made to work except that they have to clean their cells [...]”.⁴⁴ Generally, however, from 1969 onwards an acceleration in processing the refugees could be observed.⁴⁵

The second motive that was usually given by protectorate and Republic officials alike to explain the accommodation of refugees in prison was the security situation, in light of the proximity to South Africa.⁴⁶ The fourth subsection of this chapter will show that there were refugees who were abducted by South Africans or South West Africans in the British High Commission Territories. So it does not seem completely unjustified to claim that keeping the refugees in prison was a way of protecting prospective freedom fighters.

Particularly during the early months of independence the level of uncertainty seemed high among government officials. This can be illustrated by the cases of Ben Amathila

⁴¹ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/15, Cabinet Memorandum, 8.11.66

⁴² Cf. e.g. Interview with Tjatupi John Kavaria, 16.9.08

⁴³ Cf. i.a. Interview with Charlotte Kauaria, 24.9.08

⁴⁴ Botswana National Archives, OP 27/57, Director of Prisons to the Permanent Secretary to the President, 14.10.76

⁴⁵ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Reports on SWAPO and NUDO refugees, 1965–1970

⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. Interview with Kanhangwa Albert Kavaria, 13.9.08

and Joe Ithana, both SWAPO members who entered Botswana in October 1966 and only managed to leave the country by the end of 1967. They were held up in western Botswana for many months before being allowed to proceed to Francistown, and then to Zambia.⁴⁷ This was, of course, before the Refugee Recognition and Control Act was introduced when Botswana still lacked a comprehensive approach towards the refugee issue.

Another constraint that refugees faced in Botswana was the imposition of restrictions. Since the days of the protectorate it was clear that they were prohibited from getting involved in Botswana politics; this restriction was codified in the Refugee Recognition and Control Act. Other conditions obliged refugees to report to the police or other authorities on a regular basis, or not to leave a certain area without permission.⁴⁸ Section 9(2)(f) entitled the Minister of State with a prerogative to apply “ancillary or additional conditions as may appear [...] to be necessary or desirable in the circumstances of the case.”⁴⁹ As a result, different refugees were forced to come to terms with different restrictions and refugee cases were rarely dealt with consistently – yet another continuation from colonial times.

According to the logic of the legislation refugee status could only be granted for as long as the recognised refugee was in the territory of Botswana. As soon as he left Botswana he would be in the hands of a government that would not prosecute him (as would happen in the country from where he had run away). There was consequently no need to return to Botswana in order to seek protection. The one reason a refugee might want to return to Botswana would have been political agitation, which was forbidden by law. It was therefore almost imperative to declare that “a recognised refugee shall on his departure from Botswana cease to be a recognized refugee.”⁵⁰ Keeping in mind that refugees were generally declared prohibited immigrants as soon as they left the country, it was virtually impossible for freedom fighters to return to Botswana legally.

Another measure that was used to encourage refugees not to stay too long was the Amendment to the Refugee Recognition and Control Act in 1970. Before the amendment, recognised refugees had been able to look for employment under the Employment of Visitors Act of 1968. The amendment withdrew refugees from the definition of “visitor” in the act mentioned above.⁵¹ The Botswana government subsequently eased this clause when it realised the country could actually benefit from the stay of long-term

⁴⁷ Cf. Interview with Ben Amathila, 6.8.08

⁴⁸ Cf. Botswana National Archives, Refugee Recognition and Control Act 1967, Part II, 9. (2); Asser Namupala Mudhika recounts that he had to report to the immigration office in Francistown every Monday morning. Cf. Interview with Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08

⁴⁹ Botswana National Archives, Refugee Recognition and Control Act 1967, Part II, 9. (2) (f)

⁵⁰ Ibid. Part II, 10. (2)

⁵¹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/76, Refugees (Recognition and Control) Amendment Act 1970, 29.1.71

refugees. Nevertheless the Amendment Act of 1970 was a clear indication that refugees were not expected to enter into Botswana to put down roots.

The Namibia question and international relations

Having been a mandated territory of the League of Nations, the United Nations (as its successor) was commonly regarded as the body that should be in control of South West Africa to guide the territory and its people to eventual independence. This can be concluded from the early establishment of the UN Permanent Committee on South West Africa in 1953.⁵² It took some time until the General Assembly and, later, the International Court of Justice moved in the same direction. Despite the lack of *de facto* control of Namibia, the UN was an organisation that could not easily be sidelined in the Namibian conflict. As a multilateral organisation, the United Nations was – and still is – highly dependent on its member states and the actual input it receives from them. With the “wind of change” blowing through the continent, independent African states such as Botswana could play a role by supporting the United Nations as well as one another. It is necessary therefore to look at Botswana’s and the Bechuanaland Protectorate’s interaction with the UN and later the UN Council for Namibia, as well as the territory through which most Namibian freedom fighters ultimately left Botswana – Zambia. A body that could be closely linked to the liberation of all southern African countries from the colonial yoke was the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which was officially formed in 1963 and which Botswana joined immediately after her independence. Botswana’s relations with the OAU is one of the themes in the following analysis.

The Rhodesias

As the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the territories of present-day Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe constituted a single colonial unit with a substantial amount of autonomy from Britain, governed from Salisbury (Harare), between 1953 and 1963. Sharing a long common boundary with the southern territory of the Rhodesias, Botswana depended on a good relationship with the government in Salisbury, which had declared unilateral independence in 1965. Communication with Northern Rhodesia, which became independent as Zambia in 1964, was also of vital importance. With the

⁵² Cf. Dierks 2002: p. 213

commencement of the liberation struggle in southern Africa, the crossing over the Zambezi between Botswana and Zambia became one of the major lifelines for the refugees.

Since Britain's ability to have an impact on Rhodesian politics was limited,⁵³ relations between the Federation and the Bechuanaland Protectorate were anything but simple. Britain was still responsible for the external affairs of the Federation, but its leaders turned out to be headstrong at times. Before the breakdown of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, communication between the protectorate and Salisbury concerning agreement on a common understanding of the emerging refugee crisis had not worked efficiently. The Federal authorities were reluctant to offend South Africa and therefore were unwilling to make any concessions to the liberation movements.⁵⁴ Once the Federation had been dissolved, any co-operation with Southern Rhodesia was out of question for Bechuanaland. After the rise to power of the Rhodesian Front, it became more than evident that the government that declared unilateral independence in 1965 would collaborate with Pretoria, and could be looked upon as pursuing opposing goals.

A good example of these opposing goals was the escape of Peter Katjavivi, Brian Basingtwaihe and Ferdinand Meroro. All had fled South West Africa and ended up in Francistown in late September 1962.⁵⁵ They had been awarded scholarships overseas and had taken the "conventional" route via Gobabis, Ghanzi and Maun to Francistown. Their intention had been to leave the protectorate via Southern Rhodesia and then proceed further north. However, in the first Southern Rhodesian village behind the border, Plumtree, they were arrested by the Rhodesian Police because they did not have valid travel documents. They were detained for a number of weeks before being put on a train and deported to South Africa. Three black Rhodesian policemen were escorting the handcuffed and chained detainees.⁵⁶ Through South African refugees who had been prison mates of the three Namibians in Plumtree information of their impending deportation had reached the United Nations in New York. Mburumba Kerina, Jacob Kuhangwa and Markus Kooper argued strongly for Britain to intervene and prevent the detainees from falling into the hands of apartheid South Africa. The British High Commission contacted London from where instructions were given to the British High Commissioner, John Maud, who arranged for the interception of the detainees.⁵⁷ When the train stopped in Gaborone, a British official, assisted by some local policemen, ordered the Rhodesian policemen to

⁵³ Cf. Bowman 1973: p. 22

⁵⁴ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 17 E, McD Gordon to D.A. Scott, 19.4.63

⁵⁵ Cf. Dale 1995: p. 33

⁵⁶ Cf. Interview with Peter Katjavivi, 20.11.07

⁵⁷ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/148, 29, John Maud to Foreign Office, 7.11.62 and Interview with Theo-Ben Gurirab, 10.9.08

release the three Namibians and gave them a note explaining the case to the Rhodesian authorities who were just as disgruntled as Pretoria about the British intervention. Katjavivi, Bassingtwaihe and Meroro then received permission from the High Commissioner to proceed to Francistown from where they could continue their journey.⁵⁸

This rescue sparked the attention of the media in South Africa and even in Britain. British media suggested “it had long been practice for Rhodesian policemen accompanying deportees to South Africa to pass through the Bechuanaland Protectorate with their charges.”⁵⁹

This allegation raised the question whether, if the media were right, authorities in the Bechuanaland Protectorate had been aware of this practice and possibly even tacitly approved it. Rhodesian authorities later confirmed that the deportation of refugees from Rhodesia to South Africa had been taking place without the knowledge of officials in the protectorate.⁶⁰ While this confirmation freed the protectorate authorities from the suspicion



Fig. 8: Peter Katjavivi in the early 1970s as Chief of Mission in England

of collaboration with the enemy, it revealed British powerlessness against the setting of two regimes that concentrated their full forces on tightening their position in the region. The intensifying liberation war in Rhodesia made life difficult for Botswana by creating another source of instability. While it became almost impossible to control movements of guerrillas and counter-guerrillas from Rhodesia into Botswana in the late 1970s, a combined effort of the ANC and ZAPU in north-western Rhodesia in 1967 to destabilise the Rhodesian regime, the so-called Wankie campaign, turned out to be a failure. Many cadres were arrested. A few managed to cross the border into Botswana where the government of Seretse Khama had to deal with armed liberation fighters on her territory.⁶¹ In the aftermath Namibian refugees too were facing a hardening of conditions in Botswana.

⁵⁸ Cf. Interview with Peter Katjavivi, 20.11.07

⁵⁹ The Times, 10.11.62

⁶⁰ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/148, 51, Inward Telegram from Salisbury to Central African Office, 13.11.62

⁶¹ Cf. Gibson 1972: p. 68

They were being lumped together with ANC and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) guerrillas.⁶²

It became all the more necessary for Bechuanaland to develop good neighbourly relations with Northern Rhodesia, which was on the verge of independence when officials from the protectorate and from Northern Rhodesia met in Mafeking on 2 June 1964. Talks between the Northern Rhodesian Under Secretary of Home Affairs, H.H. Thompson and British protectorate officials resulted in the Thompson Agreement. Northern Rhodesia made it clear that refugees from Bechuanaland would only be permitted entry under guarantee of their onward acceptance by a neighbouring territory; it had no intention of being flooded by refugees either. If refugees were permitted to cross into Northern Rhodesia, authorities in the Bechuanaland Protectorate would be advised to provide officials in Lusaka with full details beforehand.⁶³ This was the same policy that Bechuanaland Protectorate was following at the time making it difficult for them to protest, especially considering the fact that Tanzania's attitude was temporarily hardening. Nevertheless, it was clear that this position would not immediately change after Zambian independence. Zambia was already experiencing internal self-government and, as was the case with Seretse Khama earlier, Kenneth Kaunda and his party had long been involved in matters of this dimension.⁶⁴ It is therefore highly unlikely that the Thompson Agreement came into being without the consent of Zambia's future leaders. H.H. Thompson acknowledged that the protectorate was in a delicate position and prudent handling of the liberation movements, especially concerning the relation to armed fighters, would be necessary.⁶⁵

When the UNIP government came to power it initially adhered to the principles laid down in the agreement. Once the liberation movements, including SWAPO, shifted their offices to Lusaka and when educational opportunities were offered in Zambia,⁶⁶ the country's immigration policies became less stringent and the importance of the Thompson Agreement quickly declined. A year after Zambian independence the Agreement was already put into question. However, as will be outlined in the following sections, the increasingly friendly Zambian attitude towards the liberation movements became a source of tension between the governments of Zambia and Botswana.

⁶² Cf. Interview with Ben Amathila, 6.8.08

⁶³ Cf. British National Archives, FO 371/182143, E 339, Notes of Meeting in Chief's Secretary's Office in Mafeking, 2.6.64

⁶⁴ Cf. Macpherson 1974: p. 437 ff.

⁶⁵ Cf. British National Archives, FO 371/182143, E 339, Notes of Meeting in Chief's Secretary's Office in Mafeking, 2.6.64

⁶⁶ As will be shown later, the African-American Institute opened a college in Kabwe for refugees from Southern Africa and in 1976 the United Nations Institute for Namibia was opened in Lusaka.

Zambia

Botswana's relations to Zambia became quite unique throughout the years of the southern African liberation struggle. Already as prime minister during internal self-government Seretse Khama had made a state visit to President Kaunda in Lusaka.⁶⁷ Consequently Botswana opened her first and, at that time, only High Commission in Africa in Lusaka when she became independent.⁶⁸ This meant much of the communication with independent African states took place through Botswana's representation in Zambia. Eventually the combined efforts of Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania led to the formation of the Frontline States, which later took the initiative in the Rhodesian question⁶⁹ and eventually tried to promote a solution to the Namibia conflict.

Nevertheless, relations between Botswana and Zambia were not free of friction. It soon became apparent that the two countries had different conceptions of the refugee question. Geographically, Zambia was in a more comfortable position to support refugees than Botswana and her support for the liberation movements was therefore more overt and intense. As we have come to know, Botswana interpreted the term "political refugee" in the strict sense of the term. Zambia's definition, however, included activists, freedom fighters and therefore virtually anybody entering her territory in connection with the liberation struggle.⁷⁰ Only in the initial years after independence did Zambian reluctance to accept and process refugees make it difficult for many prospective freedom fighters. This is why many Namibians were compelled to remain in Botswana longer than they had wished before they were given clearance to proceed.⁷¹ In some cases this was simply due to a lack of communication between these two countries. Botswana occasionally complained that refugees were being air lifted from her territory to Zambia without her knowledge, whereas Zambian authorities deplored the lack of information given by Botswana's authorities when refugee movements approached.⁷²

When Zambia's stance became clearer and more open and she started to follow the policies of the Organisation of African Unity, some government representatives went so far as to criticise Botswana for her passive attitude towards the liberation struggle. In this respect Kenneth Kaunda was always modest and moderate. However, his foreign minister, Simon Kapwepwe, openly intimidated Botswana when he demanded that the

⁶⁷ Dale 1995: p. 26

⁶⁸ Cf. Masire 2006: p. 297

⁶⁹ Cf. Cervenká 1979: p. 127 ff.

⁷⁰ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 56/10, Botswana High Commission Lusaka on discussions with Zambian officials, 14.1.67

⁷¹ Cf. i.a. Interview Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08 or Interview with Nangolo Mbumba, 2.10.08

⁷² Cf. Interview with Fredrick Matongo, 16.9.08; Botswana National Archives, OP 56/10, Botswana High Commission Lusaka on discussions with Zambian officials, 14.1.67

government in Gaborone should do more to support the liberation movements. Otherwise “it will not be long before other African states see the necessity of attacking such a country.”⁷³ At this point in time one certainly has to recall Vincent Khapoya’s conclusion that statements do not necessarily reflect the policy outcome. In light of the further co-operation between Zambia and Botswana, it seems highly unlikely that relations between the two could ever have deteriorated to such an extent. Besides, Quett Masire alluded to the fact that it was Kenneth Kaunda who was Botswana’s primary contact person in Zambia and therefore his pronouncements were taken more seriously.⁷⁴

Initially, Kaunda favoured a peaceful solution to the conflicts in the colonised southern African territories and promoted a “zone of peace” which would include, at least, Botswana and Zambia. The British in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, however, never quite trusted Kaunda in this regard. From their point of view, Kaunda’s “moderation is merely a means of buying time until the African states are in a position to afford to be militant.”⁷⁵ Yet, when liberation movements such as SWAPO moved their headquarters from Tanzania to Lusaka, Kaunda changed his attitude.

Zambia was usually in strong support of measures taken by the OAU and its African Liberation Committee (ALC). A further examination of Botswana’s relations to the OAU will bear this out. It is important to put on record that, with regard to the Namibia question, Zambia’s strict compliance with the parameters of the OAU exacerbated the processing of refugees in Botswana. Zambia would only receive SWAPO refugees because it was the only Namibian liberation movement recognised by the OAU.⁷⁶ Botswana was thus left with all other Namibian refugees, particularly those belonging to SWANU. This will be looked at when dealing with the activities of SWANU in Botswana. For now, further elaboration of the role of the OAU and its Liberation Committee seems essential to a better understanding of the areas of conflict in the Namibian liberation struggle.

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU)

The OAU had been founded in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa in May 1963 with the aim of realising pan-African goals in the context of greater co-operation among African states. In the aftermath of the formation of the OAU, the African Liberation Committee (ALC) was founded in order to assist those Africans who were still living under minority governments or colonial regimes.⁷⁷ The ALC was to become what Amate called the “most

⁷³ Botswana National Archives, OP 56/10, Report on Talk with Mr Amoo-Adare, 20.4.67

⁷⁴ Cf. Interview with Quett Masire, 27.6.08

⁷⁵ British National Archives,

⁷⁶ Cf. Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08

⁷⁷ Cf. Ansprenger 1975: p. 34

consistent and most purposeful of all the OAU organs”⁷⁸ and had its secretariat in Dar es Salaam. All member states were supposed to contribute to the budget of the ALC from which the African liberation movements, mainly those from territories under white minority rule and from the Portuguese colonies, were assisted financially. Since most territories striving for liberation had more than one liberation movement, it was up to the ALC to first decide which organisation to support. The ALC established the principle that only one movement from each country should be supported. Although exceptions (as in the cases of Zimbabwe and Angola) were made, the ALC, which consisted of eleven member states (from 1972 this rose to 17), decided as early as 1964 only to support SWAPO as a Namibian liberation movement. This was a consequence of Kozonguizi’s limitations on the international scene, as well as of SWAPO’s more outspoken and determined attitude towards the armed struggle.⁷⁹ It was not all that important for SWAPO to receive assistance from the ALC fund, to which most countries did not contribute to a sufficient extent anyway. The ALC recognition, however, was of great significance because the assessment of the ALC was adopted by the United Nations which, in 1973, declared SWAPO the authentic representative of the Namibian people and later even the “sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people.”⁸⁰

Botswana’s stance on the ALC was ambivalent. Although she wanted to be seen as supportive of pan-African efforts, she often disagreed with the decisions taken in Addis Ababa and Dar es Salaam. When the ALC was founded in 1963, it looked for partners in all non-independent African territories. In the case of Zambia it was already apparent that UNIP was going to be in power after independence, so co-operation with Kaunda’s party was obvious. In the British High Commission Territories elections were still pending and, in 1963, it was not yet clear if Bechuanaland would become independent as soon as it eventually did. Considering the militant rhetoric of the Bechuanaland People’s Party (BPP), which was strongly directed against the British colonial rulers, it was logical for the ALC to support Matante’s party in preference to Seretse Khama’s BDP. Even after the elections in 1965, the ALC continued its support, which was only withdrawn after an official complaint by Seretse Khama. Relations between the ALC and the new Botswana government therefore started on an unfortunate note. As Amate put it, contributions from the ALC to the opposition parties in Botswana only stopped when the “harm had [...] been done already.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Amate 1986: p. 282

⁷⁹ Cf. Ansprenger 1975: p. 144 ff.

⁸⁰ Cf. Harneit-Sievers 1985: p. 22 and Cervenka 1979: p. 151

⁸¹ Amate 1986: p. 289

Botswana's involvement in African liberation politics really started with the formation of the Frontline States. Before that she had been a rather passive member of the OAU in this respect and had occasionally been criticised in OAU meetings for allegedly arresting freedom fighters. Nonetheless, there was a sense of realism within the OAU when dealing with member states like Botswana. Considering Botswana's stance on the armed struggle, the secretary general of the OAU, Diallo Telli, recommended in 1968 that:

infiltration of cadres through Botswana be suspended for the meantime, that the possibility of using alternative routes be explored, that Botswana's offer of grant of asylum to political refugees from dependent territories be exploited [...].⁸²

In a meeting in 1969 a Botswana delegate even complained about his country's inability to contribute to the ALC fund because of the obligation to cater for all the refugees in the country. In 1972 it finally became apparent that Botswana, as well as Lesotho and Malawi, had never paid into the fund.⁸³ Besides, Botswana did not ratify the OAU Refugee Convention. Botswana never adhered to the decision of the ALC to give support only to

the recognised Namibian liberation movement, SWAPO. She chose to treat all Namibian freedom fighters and refugees on an equal basis. The government in Gaborone did not feel that it was in a position to decide which movement could be called authentic. The former president, Quett Masire, recognised that this did not please SWAPO, but his government did not want to anticipate the



Fig. 9: Seretse Khama and Quett Masire at a rally in 1979

will of the Namibian people and thought that it was wise to wait for an election to find out whom the Namibians would support.⁸⁴ This can be regarded as pursuing the same democratic goals that were considered to be practised in Botswana as well. But surely this was also a simple and well-founded excuse for limiting SWAPO's activities on her territory to a large extent? It was evident that SWAPO was the only Namibian liberation movement involved in an armed struggle and, consequently, more intense support of

⁸² Botswana National Archives, OP 15/11, Draft Cabinet Memorandum, June 1968

⁸³ Cf. Amate 1986: pp. 238–239

⁸⁴ Cf. Interview with Quett Masire, 27.6.08

SWAPO might provoke reprisals from Pretoria, at least as far as Namibia was concerned. Declaring neutrality in the conflict between the different Namibian liberation movements can therefore be seen as a strategy to avoid larger practical involvement in the Namibian liberation struggle. As already mentioned briefly, this attitude was in strong contrast to the policies of the Zambian government in Lusaka, which almost dogmatically followed the principles of the ALC and, therefore, almost unconditionally supported SWAPO, whereas SWANU members were rarely accepted by Botswana's northern neighbour.

UN Council for Namibia

When the UN Council for South West Africa was established in 1967⁸⁵ (UN Council for Namibia from 1968), it was meant to be the legal government of Namibia. The government of Botswana recognised it as the administrative authority of Namibia. This is illustrated by two examples given by Quett Masire: At one stage Botswana was considering the construction of a railway from Palapye to Walvis Bay in order to transport coal destined for export to France. Although these plans never materialised, it was not South Africa but the UN Council for Namibia that Botswana spoke to about these plans. Botswana similarly consulted the Council when a border dispute between Namibia and Botswana arose.⁸⁶ South Africa was *de facto* in charge of the Namibian territory, but still Botswana chose to speak to the *de jure* executive.

It is not necessary to elaborate further on the small influence the UN Council for Namibia exercised in light of South Africa's neglect of any UN Resolution concerning the status of Namibia. The Council's move to introduce special UN passports for Namibians in 1970 can, however, be seen as an attempt to practically express its authority. Namibians had long had a problem with travel documents as in almost all cases the South African authorities declined the application of Namibians wishing to travel abroad. It was therefore inevitable that those Namibians who left the country were unable to identify themselves or had proper documentation. This of course posed an offence that could get them into difficulties in most African countries where they had fled. Consequently, the UN Council for Namibia requested its member states (of which Botswana was one) in May 1970 to issue special UN travel documents to all Namibian refugees without proper documentation. Zambia quickly agreed, but in the case of Botswana the question was more crucial, since it was clear that Botswana would have to issue the largest number of travel documents by far because it was usually the first country Namibians arrived in when they left for exile.

⁸⁵ Interestingly Botswana, together with Malawi, abstained on the resolution that established the Council. Cf. Grundy 1973: p. 103

⁸⁶ Cf. Interview with Quett Masire, 27.6.08

Botswana's hesitant attitude towards accepting the policy of issuing travel documents could mainly be attributed to a clause that was considered to be part of the UN special passports. This stated the obligation of the issuing country to re-accept the passport holders in the event they might wish to return. It had been practice in Botswana before to equip some of the Namibian refugees with travel documents under the UN Convention on Travel Documents of 1951, which did not include a return clause. With the issuance of the special travel documents, the government of Botswana feared a considerable increase in the refugee traffic from Namibia. The UN Council for Namibia wanted to commence with the issuance of the travel documents in September 1970 and, in order to dispel Botswana's doubts, a meeting was held in Lusaka on 11 July 1970. At that stage, however, the Botswana government could not be persuaded to realise this proposal of the UN Council for Namibia. The meeting ended "cordially, but indecisively."⁸⁷

Botswana adopted a wait-and-see attitude once the issuing of travel documents commenced, but she saw, for the time being, little value in accepting the Council's proposal. Although Seretse Khama did, on occasion, lament the ineffectiveness of the UN Council for Namibia,⁸⁸ Botswana eventually started to issue the requested documents. This began after the influx of Namibians had decreased in the 1970s.⁸⁹

The South African neighbour

Pressure from South Africa and Botswana's reaction

The initial stage of refugee traffic through Bechuanaland and Botswana was affected by a general feeling of insecurity among those responsible for governing the territory. The constraints they were forced to deal with regarding the proximity of South Africa are now sufficiently known. While the British needed some time to react to the challenge of freedom fighters leaving South or South West Africa and, as the first Namibian refugees had a relatively easy passage through Bechuanaland,⁹⁰ the South African government proved to be much quicker in adjusting to the new situation by taking advantage of its superiority as a regional power.

As it became more known that there were hosts of potential freedom fighters leaving their country through Bechuanaland, the South Africans tried to tighten the border

⁸⁷ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/34, Report on a meeting with the UN Council for Namibia in Lusaka, 11.7.70

⁸⁸ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/47, Record of the Meeting held in the Cabinet Room between Khama and the Council for Namibia, 31.8.76

⁸⁹ Cf. Interview with Daniel Kwelagobe, 26.6.08

⁹⁰ Cf. Interviews with Paul Helmuth, 15.8.08 and with Hidipo Hamutenya, 6.10.08

controls as much as possible and sometimes, as will be shown later, even beyond their borders. These new circumstances had to be taken into account by both activists on their way into exile and by those who were prepared to help them in Bechuanaland. Within both groups there was great awareness that the protectorate authorities were not in a position to resist South African pressure if matters became more serious. Motsamai Mpho, whose Independence Party was very sympathetic to the cause of the liberation movements, therefore concluded:

So I was helping the refugees in secret, not because the British government did not accept the refugees. We had to do that because if our relationship with the British was... sympathetic, we might have caused some friction between the South Africans and themselves. And the only thing to do was to give them a chance to say they were not doing that. Receiving refugees from South Africa was a bad thing, so we didn't want to make it seen that we asked and they agreed.⁹¹

This example illustrates the whole dilemma of the situation. The overall enemy of the Namibians was always South Africa. Her dominance seemed to be so ubiquitous that even the Batswana themselves thought they would have to make sure their British "protectors" were protected from committing themselves too much to the liberation struggle.

In some cases where the issue of the liberation struggle was only touched on marginally, the British virtually shied away from openly confronting the South Africans. When Pretoria came forward with the request for facilities in the Bechuanaland Protectorate for moving material and equipment into the Caprivi and to the bridge over the Chobe River in December 1965, the British were slow to react and eventually decided to shift the responsibility on to the newly elected internal self-government in Gaborone.⁹² In another instance in the same year, the British discovered that the arms embargo on South Africa was being circumvented by German companies that would send weapons to bogus companies in Bechuanaland from where they reached South Africa. Still, the British did not see the need to blacklist those companies so that this channel was left open for illegal arms imports to South Africa.⁹³

We know from previous analysis (cf. p. 58 ff.) that the British lacked a comprehensive approach towards the refugee matter. With the new legislation in the Republic of Botswana, the handling of refugees was put on a firmer legal footing. However, the vulnerability of the territory could not be disregarded. Almost a year after independence the Tribune asserted that:

⁹¹ Interview with Motsamai Mpho, 25.6.08

⁹² Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/641, 19, Osborne to Campbell, 7.12.65

⁹³ Cf. British National Archives, FO 371/182101, J.E. Stevens to J.O. Coward (Ministry of Defence), 28.10.65

It is so utterly easy for the South African government to put on pressure by limiting cattle exports, sorghum exports, or labour exports, the three main sources of revenue in Botswana.⁹⁴

Throughout the years Botswana undoubtedly managed to scale down these potentially dangerous effects with her constant economic growth. Even then Pretoria did not spare the government in Gaborone the burden of the constant awareness of her supremacy. A close look at Botswana's diplomatic approaches towards the refugee matter in light of South African attempts to exercise constant leverage will identify ways and means of reconciling her principles with the South African threats.

Using a carrot and stick approach South Africa tried to provide incentives for the co-operation of the British High Commission territories and those countries in southern Africa that were about to get their independence. During the dying days of the protectorate, Pretoria frequently offered the British material and financial aid to assist them in the development of their colony. This would certainly have helped the British who had generated a rather greedy attitude towards their expenses in Bechuanaland. Still, they were aware that South African support would not come without South African leverage, and therefore South African offers were rejected time and again.⁹⁵

Nor were Seretse Khama and his government caught in this trap. Admittedly, the status of Botswana improved with the economic progress made due to the exploitation of the country's minerals. In the early years after independence additional financial and technical assistance would have benefited the newly independent republic. Yet, Seretse Khama was in such a strong position domestically that he could not only afford to respond negatively to the offers from Pretoria, but could even count on his people if a shortfall in supply arose, had South Africa tried to isolate her northern neighbour. Hence, G.D. Anderson in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom came to the conclusion in 1970 that

Khama has reached a point where he has the full trust and confidence of his own people. He would, I think, have no difficulty in successfully appealing to the country to accept shortages and hardships in the face of short-term economic difficulties.⁹⁶

Seretse Khama would not have taken advantage of this unduly, but it is evident that this personal factor was an advantage by contrast with colonial times. Before independence, the British occasionally anticipated the South African course of action, simply to make sure they were not molested by Pretoria's agents. During a meeting concerning the commencement of the Namibian liberation struggle in north-western Botswana in 1964,

⁹⁴ Tribune, 21.6.67

⁹⁵ Cf. Grundy 1973: pp. 136–137

⁹⁶ British National Archives: FCO 45/411, 2, G.D. Anderson to William Wilson, 7.10.70

which will be referred to in more detail in the sixth chapter, the British closely watched the gathering in order to find out what was being said. Moses Kandovazu, a Mbanderu from the area, therefore concluded:

It was simply an act of convenience for the British administration here to observe and to note what was going on in Makakung because they knew that the liberation movements were very active here. So they wanted to keep the South Africans at bay by saying: Look, you don't need to come yourselves, we shall do it on your behalf.⁹⁷

There can be no doubt that protectorate officials were constantly aware of the potential dangers of the proximity to South Africa. The decision to declare all freedom fighters and refugees who left the protectorate prohibited immigrants was based on considerations of Bechuanaland's vulnerable status. Philipp Steenkamp, District Commissioner in Francistown between 1962 and 1967, openly admits that the South African threat incessantly guided decision-makers in the protectorate and that the "fear of reprisals" was omnipresent.⁹⁸

While the policy to declare all those who had left the territory prohibited immigrants continued even after independence, the government of the Republic of Botswana was keen to develop its own policies and face South Africa as a self-confident independent state that was, at the same time, well aware of its own limits and deficiencies. Botswana's stance on South Africa resembled a tightrope walk between the interests of the pan-African objectives of the fellow OAU member states and the expectations of her southern neighbour. Botswana never exchanged diplomatic missions with South Africa. However, communication between the governments in Gaborone and Pretoria never broke down completely⁹⁹ thereby possibly averting the escalation of their bilateral relations.

Evidence of a palpable prudence could doubtless be discerned in the approach to the refugee question in independent Botswana. Quett Masire points to the fact that a build-up of refugee numbers was to be avoided because Botswana did not want to provide Pretoria with a motive for attacking her.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the common practice of imprisoning refugees in order to protect them from South African intervention testifies to a certain nervousness in Gaborone. There was an understanding within the Khama government that a substantial amount of outspokenness *vis-à-vis* the white minority regimes had to go along with the country's endeavours to have its vulnerable status recognised by other African states that were more actively involved in the liberation struggle. The former

⁹⁷ Interview with Moses Kandovazu, 25.7.08

⁹⁸ Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

⁹⁹ Cf. Dale 1972: p. 116

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Interview with Quett Masire, 27.6.08

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Archibald Mogwe, regarded the use of outspokenness as an efficient instrument, particularly as the potential damage to his country seemed manageable. He emphasised that South Africa would not have simply attacked Botswana because she publicly took up a negative stance on South Africa.¹⁰¹ It is indeed striking that when South Africa raided Gaborone in 1985 and 1986, she did not legitimise this with a general anti-South African attitude of Botswana, but with the assumption that Botswana was harbouring ANC guerrillas.¹⁰²

Without any doubt Botswana and South Africa did veer away from each other over the course of time. While this can be partly ascribed to the growing confidence in Botswana with the increasingly profitable exploitation of minerals and the consequent development that took place in many sectors, it was also due to the increasing South African isolation as a result of the Portuguese departure from Angola and Mozambique and Zimbabwean independence in 1980. Of course, there were frequent advances from Pretoria to co-operate in the refugee situation, but on many occasions, Botswana simply did not comply. Daniel Kwelagobe, then Minister of State, remembers:

The South Africans were demanding all the time that we return refugees to South Africa, but we told them quite blank[ly] that we were not prepared to do that.¹⁰³

Further indications of Botswana's growing self-esteem in her relations with South Africa were the commencement of diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in 1967 and 1970 respectively,¹⁰⁴ which caused outrage in Pretoria, her withdrawal from the Rand Zone in 1976 and the fact that Botswana could never be forced into a non-aggression pact with Pretoria as was the case with Mozambique and Swaziland.¹⁰⁵

Interestingly, however, in the case of Namibia Botswana appeared reluctant at stages to adopt a clear stance. Botswana did recognise the UN Council for Namibia as a legitimate body, however, a realistic approach was followed by not neglecting the fact that South Africa was the actual governing body in Namibia. At the United Nations in 1968, for example, Botswana abstained in a resolution that called for the withdrawal of the South African authority from Namibia on the grounds that South Africa was the *de facto* administrative power and should be engaged in negotiations to ultimately facilitate self-determination.¹⁰⁶ Later on the government in Gaborone did not maintain this principle.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Cf. Interview with Archibald Mogwe, 22.7.08

¹⁰² Cf. Hanlon 1986b: pp. 223–224

¹⁰³ Interview with Daniel Kwelagobe, 26.6.08

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Grundy 1973: p. 137

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hanlon 1986b: pp. 220–231

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Grundy 1973: pp. 103–104

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Masire 2006: pp. 275 ff.

Violation of Botswana's territory

Increased self-confidence in Botswana did not imply that the territory was no longer vulnerable. Even today the country is dependent on South Africa in many respects. This applied even more in the days of the British protectorate when border raids from South Africa and the strategy of "hot pursuit" were hardly detectable.¹⁰⁸ In fact, it was virtually impossible to control a territory the size of Bechuanaland with a police force as ill-equipped as that during colonial times or the early days of independence. Not without justification did Hermans call the country "indefensible".¹⁰⁹ During colonial times the British themselves were aware of the presence of officers of the South African Police on their territory but, on the other hand, they also recognised their limited possibilities of resistance. In a telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the British High Commissioner frankly confessed that

in present circumstances it is extremely difficult to prevent their [i.e. the South Africans'] entry. Effective attempts to restrict their entry would certainly bring retaliatory action. We have no ready solution to this problem as long as the headquarters of the Bechuanaland Protectorate government, the Bechuanaland Protectorate Police and the Special Branch are situated in the Republic of South Africa.¹¹⁰

As long as South African interference was confined to the simple observation of certain areas, the British felt no need to complain publicly and thereby provoke the South Africans. Even potential freedom fighters were unsure whether they were facing a South African agent or possibly just a local settler when they encountered a white person.¹¹¹

In the case of a more apparent sign of aggression, however, a public response from the British was expected and inevitable. A major setback for all the southern African liberation movements was the explosion of the newly built "White House" in Francistown on 26 July 1964. The White House had been a reception centre in Francistown for refugees from all neighbouring territories on their way into exile. At a very early stage of the liberation struggle in southern Africa Francistown had already become the main transit centre for refugees and prospective freedom fighters. Francistown had the advantage of being reasonably far away from South Africa and was therefore more protected from South African aggression, although the proximity to Rhodesia did not prove to be a blessing,

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Barber/Barratt 1990: p. 74

¹⁰⁹ Hermans 1973: p. 198

¹¹⁰ British National Archives: CO 1048/531, 33, His Majesty's Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24.10.63

¹¹¹ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Vitalis Ankama 21.08.08 and Festus Muundjua, 22.8.08



Fig. 10: Arrival of the Bulawayo–Cape-town train at Francistown railway station on 5th October 1959

either.¹¹² As the old “White House” could not cater for the increasing influx of refugees, a new “White House” was built along the Tati River with the support of various non-governmental and welfare organisations. The day before its inauguration it was blown up. As the house was as yet unoccupied no one was injured, but of course the assault made it more difficult for the British to accommodate the refugees adequately.¹¹³ It was an unmistakable message to the freedom fighters. No evidence was ever found, but there was little doubt that the cause of the explosion lay on the shoulders of the South African Bureau of State Security (BOSS).¹¹⁴ Although similar incidents did not recur continuously, it was well understood from then on that Pretoria did not turn a blind eye on the exodus of potential freedom

fighters and would not shrink from violating foreign territory.

This was not the first time that a South African border violation – although not proven – included physical violence or had the intention of violence. There were, for example, instances in which fleeing members of liberation movements were pursued into the territory of Bechuanaland. One case concerned refugees from South West Africa and is therefore of particular interest for this book: the abduction of Kenneth Abrahams and his group in western Botswana in 1963. The incident has been covered in great detail in a number of works, in Colin Leys’ and Susan Brown’s collected edition “Histories of Namibia”.¹¹⁵

¹¹² With the intensifying guerilla war in Rhodesia ever more border violations of Rhodesian security forces were recorded. Cf. Southall 1984: p 161

¹¹³ Cf. Interviews with Solomon Hidinua, 31.8.08 and Mesag Moruko, 3.10.08

¹¹⁴ Cf. Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

¹¹⁵ Cf. Leys/Brown 2005: pp. 139–157. Kenneth Abrahams and his SWAPO colleagues Shipanga, Beukes and Smith were kidnapped by South West African policemen on the territory of Bechuanaland near Ghanzi while they were fleeing from South West Africa. They were brought back to South West Africa and taken to court in Cape Town from where they were released after Pretoria had come under pressure because of this illegal abduction.

Examining the abduction of Kenneth Abrahams and his SWAPO colleagues, Andreas Shipanga, Hermanus Beukes and Paul Smith, in the east of Ghanzi in August 1963, it is remarkable to observe how keen the British were to keep a low profile in the whole affair. This did not mean that they were unsympathetic to the cause of the Abrahams group. When it became clear that these Namibians were running away from prosecution in South West Africa, the District Commissioner of Ghanzi personally attended to them and kept them at a government rest house in Ghanzi – treatment that few of the later refugees received. When Abrahams and his colleagues were kidnapped, it was more than evident that British territorial integrity had been violated. A declarative statement and public accusations, as would have been certain in the case of a violation of South African territorial integrity, failed to materialise. There was constant communication between the British Ambassador in South Africa and the South African Deputy Minister of Defence, but publicly it seemed that the only pressure on South Africa was exercised by the media.¹¹⁶ Within the Foreign Office discussions took place on whether to publicly ask for disciplinary action against the South West African policemen, who were the abductors, and demand a South African apology; in the end the British preferred quiet diplomacy.

Abrahams and his colleagues were handed over by the South African Police to the police of the protectorate less than three weeks after their kidnapping at the Mamono Border Post.¹¹⁷ The British Ambassador internally justified the British low profile by elaborating on his good relationship with the South African Deputy Minister of Defence:

[The Abrahams case was] one of comparatively few occasions on which the South African government has acted with moderation and restraint. It is surely in our interests to show that such action pays. [...] Jooste [Deputy Minister for Defence] said it was the manner in which we raised the matter that made it possible for the decision to be undertaken to return them.¹¹⁸

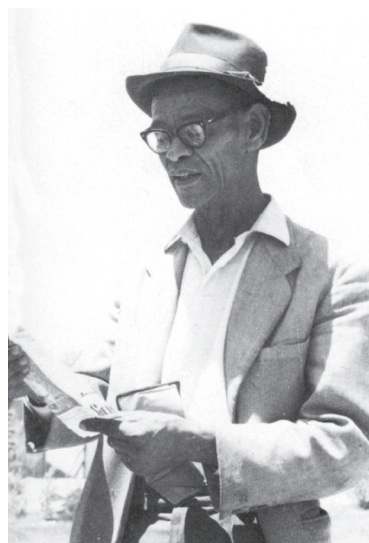


Fig. 11: Hermanus Beukes, one of the Namibian fugitives, 1963 in Botswana

¹¹⁶ Cf. British National Archives, FO 371/167544, Foreign Office to Stephenson, 389, 27.8.63

¹¹⁷ Cf. British National Archives, FO 371/167545, 248, Stephenson to Foreign Office, 31.8.63

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, FO 371/167545, 273, Stephenson to Foreign Office, 9.9.63



Fig 12: SWAPO leaders Andreas Shipanga (left) and Homateni Kaluenja in Dar es Salaam, 1973

Pretoria was of course pleased that the British had not publicly complained about such a fundamental disregard of their sovereign power. Furthermore, the British were able at least to claim partial success because they had eventually got the hostages back. But as the British did not make further enquiries at a higher government level, it could not be proved that the government in Pretoria, or at least more senior police officials, had instigated the kidnapping. The protectorate police interviewed all the hostages as well as their driver who was with them almost up to the time of the kidnapping. Apart from a telephone conversation made by one of the kidnappers and overheard by one of the hostages, which had taken place on the farm in South West Africa where the hostages were temporarily held, no real evidence could be found. In that conversation, Deventer, one of the kidnappers, reported that “the mission

had been completed.”¹¹⁹ There is no proof that he referred to the Abrahams abduction when he spoke about “mission”. Besides it is not clear with whom he spoke and, as Pretoria insisted the kidnappers had acted on their own initiative, it cannot be determined how far the government of South Africa dared to invade foreign territory to capture potential freedom fighters.¹²⁰

Conclusion

It has become evident that it took a number of years before Bechuanaland and Botswana respectively were able to adapt to the increasing influx of refugees from neighbouring southern African territories. While in the protectorate this could partly be attributed to the marginal interest of the British in the territory and the consequent deficiencies in ad-

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 73, G E Millard on the Abrahams Case, 20.9.63

¹²⁰ Interestingly, one of the kidnappers is still alive and currently lives in Sasolburg/South Africa. The author managed to speak to him on the phone, but he was not prepared to share any information on the Abrahams case.

ministration, the cause was primarily the maelstrom of conflicting interests in the region and the continual transformations both in the region and on the continent in general. As the liberation struggle in southern Africa intensified, the need for more consistent refugee legislation became necessary. The Refugee Recognition and Control Act was the result of comprehensive consideration of what was feasible in handling the refugees. The establishment of Refugee Advisory Councils provided a basis for a thoroughly organised procedure even though it was afflicted with delays, which left some of the refugees with a feeling of insecurity.

Despite this more comprehensive legislation, much depended on Botswana's bilateral relations and her interaction with multilateral organisations. Conflicting interests were almost the order of the day. More important, however, was the southern neighbour that Botswana had to take into account. South Africa was a factor that could not be disregarded. In many instances the colonial government and, to a slightly lesser extent, the Republican government were forced to reflect on possible responses from Pretoria before deciding on the implementation of certain policies or when being active on the international scene. Pretoria's assertiveness, however, had its limits, which applied as well to the room for manoeuvre in the handling of the liberation movements. Substantial room for manoeuvre was certainly achieved by the establishment of the Refugee Advisory Councils. This clearly demonstrated to Pretoria that Botswana was willing to decide on asylum cases on a legal basis in a formalised procedure, in which it would be difficult for the South Africans to interfere in one way or another.

As we have seen pressure on Botswana was equally exerted from the other side of the political spectrum. During the time of British administration neither the OAU nor the UN placed a strong focus on the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Post independent Botswana soon found itself exposed to attempts calling for pan-African solidarity from the OAU or for more understanding concerning the refugee treatment from the UN (as the issue of the travel documents exemplifies). Yet, both refugee legislation and interaction with neighbouring countries and multinational organisations support the image of Botswana, undoubtedly with certain constraints, cutting her own path in the handling of the refugee issues. We recall that Keohane and Nye emphasised the role of multilateral and transnational organisations.¹²¹ The accounts presented above certainly highlight that neglecting the demands made on Botswana by the OAU and the UN, and only focusing on South Africa's leverage, would make the analysis incomplete. This chapter, therefore, leaves us with the impression that despite her vulnerability Botswana was left with several policy options.

¹²¹ Cf. Chapter 1: Criteria for a well-founded analysis, p. 8 ff.

5 The Role of Residents and Organisations in Botswana

It is now the aim to step down from the national level, or from what one could term the “macrostructures”, and focus on the actors themselves, thereby moving on to the “microstructures”. This will be done from two different perspectives: from the point of view of the liberation movements (chapters 6 to 8), as well as from the viewpoint of those who were facilitating the movements of refugees and prospective freedom fighters (chapter 5). Not every freedom fighter in transit necessarily requested help from the authorities or was forced to request it. Political activists who left Namibia early on in the struggle stood a chance of getting through Bechuanaland reasonably easily. Even during the years after independence Quett Masire admitted the possibility of freedom fighters travelling through Botswana undetected.¹ Considering this likelihood, Nahas Angula who entered the Bechuanaland Protectorate in late 1965 concluded that:

the possibilities were there. Look at the fact that we walked all the way to Shakawe without having been noticed. Shakawe is not near the border.²

Not having been noticed officially did not imply that the freedom fighters made no contacts on the way. On the contrary, it seems hardly possible to cross a country as vast and as dry as Botswana without the help of people. This chapter explores the links Namibian refugees and freedom fighters had in Bechuanaland and Botswana. While special focus will be on the Ovaherero communities, the other Batswana as well as political parties and aid agencies are noted.

Awareness of the Namibian liberation struggle was certainly greater among the Ovaherero than among other population groups in Botswana. Despite the dedicated efforts of Batswana politicians such as Tshekedi Khama in the 1940s, the majority of the Batswana could not be presumed to have been particularly conscious of the developments in the neighbouring territory. Recalling the history of the Ovaherero in Botswana makes it inevitable to further look at their role in the liberation struggle.

The analysis of the role of the Ovaherero in Botswana leads us to examine the concept of transnational networks. In recent years researchers both in social sciences and in historical science have started to engage in the problems of transnationalisation against the background of cross-border developments and increasing migration. Transnational networks are assumed to be conducive to the circulation of “knowledge, norms, atti-

¹ Cf. Interview with Quett Masire, 27.6.08

² Interview with Nahas Angula, 13.8.08

tudes, cultural practices and lifestyles.”³ Hoerder points to the fact that migrants “keep connections to a territorially-based real or mythical community of origin and between the segments of the diaspora.”⁴ He emphasises the networks that develop due to the constant contact between the communities and, at the same time, stresses the difference between voluntary (e.g. labour) migration and politically motivated migration that is not necessarily voluntary. He acknowledges that:

political refugees, ‘expats’ or exiles, as activists, hope to influence political developments and, eventually, to return. They are usually more concerned with the nation-state of origin than labour migrants.⁵

In the case of the Ovaherero in Botswana we are not only dealing with political activists but, without any doubt, with the descendants of political refugees. It will consequently be fruitful to see how pronounced this orientation towards Namibia was during the Namibian liberation struggle against South African occupation. Regarding Hoerder’s quote, one has to accept the limitation that there was no such thing as a “nation-state” in Namibia at the time with which the Ovaherero could identify. Thus, the term nation could refer to the nation of the Ovaherero.

While pan-African sentiments are assumed to have been rather weak in other sectors of the population, political parties in Botswana had a stronger sense of the developments on the continent and, in particular, in the neighbouring territories. Therefore this chapter will pay attention to the major political parties. While we may presume that the BDP, as the ruling party, was rather reluctant to actively support freedom fighters on Botswana’s territory, priority will be given to the opposition parties in this analysis. Constraints faced by opposition parties, however, have to be taken into account. In an analysis in 1998, Adebayo Olukoshi pointed to the uneven legal playing field, the weakness of a national membership base and the little influence in rural areas as some of the disadvantages of opposition parties in Africa.⁶ Although Olukoshi focused on the developments after the end of the cold war, these features were at that time even more characteristic of the opposition in Botswana throughout the liberation struggle and influenced the activities of the opposition parties with regard to the Namibian liberation movements.

The last category that deserves mention is the impact of aid agencies, both national and international. Harto Hakovirta noted that “international refugee aid may also affect the conflict situation”⁷ in a kind of war situation. Although the Namibia issue should be

³ Unfried/Mittag 2008: p. 10 f.

⁴ Hoerder 2008: p. 82

⁵ Ibid.: p. 82

⁶ Cf. Olukoshi 1998: pp. 29–32

⁷ Hakovirta 1986: p. 101

regarded as being a conflict rather than a war, it was a political conflict, and a few indications of more than just passive involvement of the welfare organisations can be noted.

Botswana's Ovaherero

When the first freedom fighters left Namibia, the Ovaherero in exile had been settled in Botswana for a number of decades. Most of those belonging to communities in Ngamiland, Mahalapye or Toromoja had not experienced eviction from Namibia personally. They had been born in Botswana. Nonetheless, Botswana's Ovaherero had never forgotten their roots and always kept in mind that one day, with the independence of Namibia, they might be able to return.

However, loyalties changed slightly when Botswana became independent in 1966.⁸ Living in an independent African state was a new situation for the Batswana and this applied to the Ovaherero as well. They were all citizens of the Republic of Botswana, so there was a legitimate feeling among them that a contribution had to be made towards developing their newly independent country. Even so, they remained wary when it came to the liberation struggle in Namibia.



Fig. 13: Water seller in the Herero settlement of Mahalapye (Botswana), 1959

⁸ Cf. Interview with Moses Kandovazu, 25.7.08

Mbanderu activities in Ngamiland

So far in the chapter we have used the term “Ovaherero” to refer to the overall ethnic group, both Herero-Herero and Ovambanderu. Now we will explicitly look at the Ovambanderu in Ngamiland, the place where they had primarily settled. For many decades the question of their overall chief remained undecided. The British had come to the conclusion that there were two factions among the Ovambanderu in Ngamiland: one followed Stephanus Bengani and the other supported Phakalane Keharanyo Nikodemus. As Bengani never developed an interest in liberation politics, the Ovambanderu increasingly tended to join the Nikodemus group who, by the end of the 1950s, became ever more involved in the liberation struggle in South West Africa.⁹ Nikodemus played an important role when the first calls for independence were heard. The following subsection describes his involvement once the liberation struggle started to take shape.



Fig. 14: Mbanderu and Herero farmers at Ncwe-le-tau in the Kwena Reserve (Botswana), 1953

Chief Munjuku

Nikodemus had been engaged in collecting funds from the Ovambanderu people in Ngamiland for petitioners to be sent to the United Nations. He had met with Sam Nujoma and Hosea Kutako on occasional visits to Namibia, for example when handing over funds.¹⁰ This co-operation can be traced back to 1948 when he was working with Hosea Kutako and Tshekedi Khama in the Namibian context. In a petition that he sent to the United Nations in 1958, he anticipated the armed struggle:

⁹ Cf. British National Archives: DO 157/9, 1, Central Intelligence Committee Reports, July 1960

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* and Interviews with Sam Nujoma, 20.8.08 and Moses Kandovazu, 25.7.08

If all peaceful efforts fail [...] we [...] would join hand in glove with our fellow men in South West Africa.¹¹

In the Bechuanaland Protectorate Nikodemus was a controversial figure. For a long time he had faced problems over the chieftainship of the Batawana. He was not prepared to take up a subordinate role to the chief of the Batawana (who supported Stephanus), thus hindering the British system of indirect rule. His involvement with early Namibian liberation politics made him a thorn in Britain's flesh.¹²

When the Ovambanderu in Namibia who, up until that time, were living under the traditional rule of Hosea Kutako and under Headman Hoveka in Epukiro, started to strive for more autonomy from the Herero-Herero by requesting Nikodemus as their own chief, the British had no interest in preventing this; they felt relieved that Nikodemus would be installed in Epukiro in South West Africa where he would then remain.¹³ Since the South Africans saw in him a counterweight to Hosea Kutako,¹⁴ who seemed to become the overall leader of the growing liberation efforts in Namibia, they did not object his appointment. He was installed as Chief Munjuku Nguvauva II on 10 October 1960 in Epukiro.¹⁵ While Mbanderu traditionalists regarded Munjuku's installation as a move that would be a true inspiration for the liberation struggle, the progressive SWANU leaders many of whom were Ovambanderu as well, denounced the Mbanderu decision because they feared that Munjuku would become nothing more than a puppet of the South African regime.¹⁶ Certainly, some of the leaders already realised that Munjuku could have been more useful as an organiser for SWANU in Ngamiland.

Munjuku had been among the first SWANU members in Ngamiland. He had been surrounded by a young and relatively educated Ovambanderu elite that included political activists such as Edwin Kuazire, Kamue Tjozongoro and Daniel Munamava, whose advice had made a great impact on his political thinking.¹⁷ Notably, Daniel Munamava had been a close associate of Munjuku. As his secretary he accompanied him to South West Africa on his visits to Hosea Kutako and had become a prohibited immigrant in South West Africa.¹⁸ During the liberation struggle Daniel Munamava emerged as the leading

¹¹ Resolution quoted in ua Kandapaera 1992: pp. 59–60

¹² Cf. Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08 and British National Archives: DO 157/9, 1, Central Intelligence Reports, July 1960

¹³ Cf. Interview with Moses Kandovazu, 25.7.08

¹⁴ Cf. Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08

¹⁵ Cf. ua Kandapaera 1992: p. 60

¹⁶ Cf. Interview with Charles Kauraisa, 18.9.08

¹⁷ Cf. ua Kandapaera 1992: p. 60

¹⁸ Cf. Interview with Esau Muzeu, 17.9.08

figure among the Ovambanderu in Ngamiland who helped the freedom fighters a great deal, hiding them from potential South African spies and smoothing their transit through Bechuanaland or Botswana respectively.



Fig. 15: Chief Munjuku Nguvauva II (seated, centre) and Mbanderu as well as Herero followers during commemorations at Oijunda, a farm in eastern Namibia, in August 1985

Daniel Munamava

Daniel Munamava was among the first generation of Ovaherero born in Bechuanaland. He was born in Sehitwa in 1927 where he grew up and where the elders of the Ovambanderu told him about the bitter experiences of their expulsion from South West Africa. This inspired him to get actively involved in the struggle against the plight of his people. He drew further motivation from reading about the emerging leaders of the African continent such as Kwame Nkrumah or Julius Nyerere.¹⁹ Just as Nikodemus Munjuku, Munamava was a SWANU member almost from the start of the organisation. At that time this did not imply differences in ideology or choosing sides in the liberation struggle. As SWAPO did not exist at that time, Munjuku and

¹⁹ Cf. Interview with Mbeuta ua-Ndjarakana, 22.8.08

Munamava joined SWANU. This did not imply that his loyalty was only to SWANU. Ua-Ndjarakana asserts:

He was above political affiliation. His quest was for Namibia to be free and independent.²⁰

Indeed, there was no other member of the Herero communities in Botswana who became as active as Munamava in helping the refugees on their way into exile by providing them with shelter, transport and logistics.²¹ When Sam Nujoma fled in February 1960, contact with Munamava had already been established through his earlier visits to Namibia with Munjuku. Thus, Daniel Munamava was instrumental in receiving Sam Nujoma in Botswana where he accommodated him at his place in Sehitwa in order to keep him safe before personally accompanying him all the way to Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia via Francistown.²² Particularly throughout the 1960s, Daniel Munamava became a major source of help for virtually all SWANU and SWAPO refugees. It was known that he was the person to contact and those freedom fighters that took the route via Sehitwa took advantage of this. Daniel Munamava gave them temporary shelter, often at his own house, frequently drawing in other members of the Ovambanderu community. Though a SWANU member, even its representative (see chapter 6), Daniel Munamava's activities were directed out of a strong feeling for the movement, not a particular organisation. Wolf Donner emphasises that a movement is not an organisation, but an intellectual concept that reflects the mindset of its members.²³ With regard to "ideologies, goals and organisation", however, there can be a substantial amount of diversity within the movement.²⁴ In this sense Munamava regarded the liberation movement as the overall idea to be pursued and to which he dedicated his endeavours.

He was constantly active mobilizing people for the liberation struggle while trying to make his community aware of the occurrences in Namibia. Moses Ndjarakana remarks:

He was a political figure, a freedom fighter, a revolutionary. Meetings were held at his household. That's how I got sensitised and conscious of the fact that there was a motherland somewhere.²⁵

Munamava's activities were twofold. As well as being the main contact point and place of refuge for the freedom fighters, he tried to extend the liberation struggle across the border

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Helao Shityuwete, 15.8.08, Festus Muundjua, 22.8.08 and Zed Ngavirue, 25.8.08

²² Cf. Nujoma 2001 pp. 85–86

²³ Cf. Donner 1955: pp. 556–557

²⁴ Stammers 2009: p. 137

²⁵ Interview with Moses Ndjarakana, 16.9.08

so that the Herero people in Botswana could play their part. Especially for younger Ovaherero he was an inspiration. As ua-Ndjarakana recounts:

[...] he would tease some of us who were close relatives to say: What do you do here in Botswana? You are here being like second hand citizens of Botswana while your brothers and sisters are in Zambia or Angola fighting for your country. He would test a young Herero-Mbanderu who would like to come to South West Africa to look for a job. He would rather encourage that you go into exile and join the liberation struggle.²⁶

As we will see later in this chapter, Munamava's engagement laid the groundwork for the recruitment of a younger group of Ovaherero and Ovambanderu in the 1970s. In his efforts to mobilise people for the struggle Munamava acted with great integrity, for example, he did not shy away from sending his own daughter to fight for SWAPO. Munamava himself went abroad for military training for six months.²⁷

Yet, his loyalties also extended to the independent country of Botswana of which he, of course, was a citizen; his son became a member of the Botswana Defence Force. Ua-Ndjarakana comments on Munamava's dual loyalty:

So in as much as he had love for Namibia, he would also contribute his kith and kin to the development, the security and the welfare of Botswana. He would be an embodiment of what would be SADC today.²⁸

In his passion for both the Namibian liberation struggle and Botswana's independence, Munamava was certainly outstanding in the Ovambanderu community. Various freedom fighters passing through Ngamiland in the early 1960s observed that in most Herero and Mbanderu communities in Bechuanaland, the awareness of the commencing liberation struggle was pronounced mainly within the radical and committed circle around Daniel Munamava.²⁹ In this way political activities in Ngamiland could be kept secret more easily. At a later stage, in the 1970s, the Lutheran Church Mission in Sehitwa (established in 1969) gave refuge to freedom fighters mainly by providing tents, and later, proper housing.³⁰

Sehitwa had the advantage of lying directly on the way from Ghanzi via Maun to Francistown. Refugees therefore had a convenient stopover. The Ovambanderu community in Toromoja in central Botswana was prepared to help and did so when refugees passed through. It was, however, less accessible and consequently few freedom fighters sought help in that area.³¹

²⁶ Interview with Mbeuta ua-Ndjarakana, 22.8.08

²⁷ Cf. Ibid.

²⁸ Interview with Mbeuta ua-Ndjarakana, 22.8.08

²⁹ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Hidipo Hamutenya, 6.10.08 and Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

³⁰ Cf. Interview with Moses Kandovazu, 25.7.08

³¹ Cf. Interview with S. N. Nguvauva, 25.7.08

Help from the Herero communities

In 1961 when the United Nations Permanent Committee on South West Africa under Professor Fabregat from Uruguay wanted to visit South West Africa, South Africa refused entry. The Committee had to make do with meeting representatives of the Namibian liberation movements in Dar es Salaam. The Committee wanted to find out whether the Namibian freedom fighters could count on the Ovaherero in Botswana. Daniel Munamava was present in Dar es Salaam at that time and was asked: "Do the Herero[s] in Botswana support the liberation struggle?" He answered: "Yes, very much."³² Of course at that time the notions of the Namibian struggle were different to what was to evolve later. In 1961 Hosea Kutako was still seen as the overall figure behind the plans to free Namibia.³³

Nonetheless, Munamava's statement reflected the spirit among Herero communities in Botswana. One might wonder about the significance of the majority of freedom fighters



Fig. 16: Petitioners before the UN committee on South West Africa in Dar es Salaam 1961. From left to right: Front Row: Zedekia Ngavirue; Michael Scott; Emil Appolus; Paul Helmuth; Nathan Mbaeva; Daniel Munamava; Solomon Mifima. Back Row: Sam Nujoma; Leonard Ledick; Paul Shipanga; Mburumba Kerina; Elias !Gawanab; Peter Mwashihange; Nelulu

³² Interview with Moses Katjuongua, 4.8.08

³³ Cf. Ibid.

leaving Namibia not being Ovaherero, but Ovambo or people from other Namibian ethnic groups. Without any doubt Ovaherero and Ovambanderu had an advantage because most of them had relatives somewhere in Bechuanaland or Botswana. However, particularly during the early 1960s, Ovambo and other freedom fighters were given as much refuge as the Ovaherero themselves. As Nahas Angula describes: "In those days we were just Namibians."³⁴

The Ovaherero in western Botswana

Western Botswana is a vast and sparsely populated area. During the early days of the liberation struggle there was no urban centre, even Ghanzi was just a small outpost of the British colonial administration in the Kalahari. For freedom fighters and refugees from Namibia it was all the more important to have some contacts in the hostile environment of the Kalahari. These contacts existed in the form of the Hereros who were living in small villages in the border area of Mamuno and Makunda as well as further south in the area of Kule, in Ghanzi itself and also further north between Ghanzi and Maun. For those Ovaherero who had relatives in the area, it felt a bit like coming home, although the ultimate focus was not on visiting relatives, but on escaping South African rule in order to take part in the liberation struggle. Even so, Tunguru Huaraka remembers his encounter with his Herero relatives in Botswana:

That time when I came to the first village in Botswana I found my people in the most remote house. It was so strange that people were speaking Herero so far from home. They asked me: Who are you? I said: One of your lost children.³⁵

It certainly was an encouragement for many Otjiherero speaking freedom fighters to be hosted by people from the same ethnic background whilst on a strenuous and exhausting journey abroad. Even the Ovambo took advantage of the potential to regain their strength among the Herero people in Botswana. Furthermore, living among the Ovaherero served as a means of protection, at least for a few days, in order not to be detected by South African agents or potentially hostile police forces. Paul Helmuth, who was among the first Namibians to leave the country when he escaped in 1961, was not ethnically Herero, but could still count on the help from the Ovaherero:

We had now become part of the people of Botswana and the Ovaherero people. They kept us. [...] So in Makunda we had to be among our people. They protected us. During the day we didn't move, only during the night if we were to visit other people.³⁶

³⁴ Interview with Nahas Angula, 13.8.08

³⁵ Interview with Tunguru Huaraka, 23.9.08

³⁶ Interview with Paul Helmuth, 15.8.08

In many instances the help from Herero individuals concerned the very basic needs of the refugees. The refugees were given food and accommodation, they were given directions and they were told where to meet other people who were supportive of their struggle and which people to avoid.³⁷ To the Ovaherero it was a matter of supporting those they regarded to be of the same blood. They did not fully understand the differences between SWAPO and SWANU. Initially, they regarded Hosea Kutako as the overall leader. The fact that the leaders of SWAPO and SWANU, Sam Nujoma and Jariretundu Kozonguizi, were both sent into exile by the Chief's Council probably reinforced this perception. Hosea Kutako was the person at whom their loyalty was directed,³⁸ and so support to the prospective freedom fighters was easily given.

The Ovaherero of Mahalapye

As a consequence of geographical logic, most Herero communities in Botswana had settled in the western and north-western part of the country. As indicated above, a group under Samuel Maharero was accommodated by Seretse Khama's grandfather in the eastern part of the country. The descendants of this group proved highly supportive of the Namibian liberation struggle. The importance of this community becomes evident only at second sight. Mahalapye was not on the general route into exile. Except for those that left South West Africa via South Africa, no refugee would have passed through any eastern town south of Francistown.

The relative proximity to Francistown made Mahalapye an ideal place for refugees to hide temporarily. Temporary refuge became a necessity for those freedom fighters who had escaped from the recruitment system of WENELA in Francistown and were therefore at risk of prosecution. (The issue of taking advantage of the WENELA system will be tackled in the seventh chapter when looking at SWAPO's practices in more detail.)

Mahalapye village is situated on the railway line along the eastern side of Botswana that connects Mafikeng with Bulawayo in Rhodesia. It lies almost halfway between Gaborone and Francistown and it housed a Herero quarter with its own *kgotla*. In this community quite a few would-be freedom fighters were given temporary asylum, especially in the early 1960s. The Herero community in Mahalapye was more "tswanaised" than the communities in Ngamiland or western Botswana,³⁹ which proved to be an advantage as many refugees had relatives among the people in Mahalapye. Furthermore, there had been contact between the Ovaherero in South West Africa and the people in

³⁷ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Haimbodi ya Nambinga-Kati, 12.9.08 and Helao Shityuwete, 15.9.08

³⁸ Cf. Interview with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

³⁹ Cf. Kebonang 1984: p. 22

Mahalapye as Katjikuru Katjiuongua (father of Moses Katjiuongua who later became one of the leading SWANU figures) had been appointed as an ambassador by Hosea Kutako in order to pass on information between the chiefs in exile and the chiefs in Namibia.⁴⁰ Maxton Joseph Mutongulume, long time SWAPO representative in Francistown and an Ovambo, also had good links with the people in Mahalapye.⁴¹ He made use of his connections in Mahalapye to free a group of prospective PLAN combatants, including John Nankhudu ya Otto, who had been temporarily detained in Mahalapye in 1962 due to lack of documentation.⁴²

During the days when escape from the WENELA camp in Francistown was common (see chapter 7 for details), the refugees had to postpone their escape to a later stage of the journey to the mines and Mahalapye posed the best option. Samson Ndeikwila and his group, who had fled Namibia in November 1965, made use of this opportunity:

When we arrived in Mahalapye we jumped out because the train was very slow. It was early in the morning between four and five. We disappeared in the bush. During the days we sent two of us to go into the location to see whether we could make some connections. We did our homework very well because when we went there we created a new story all together. People there were very clever. They did not accept our story. We should just tell them the whole truth and then they would assist us. They received us very warmly, those Otjiherero speaking people in Mahalapye. They told us we should not be seen by anybody except those who received us. His name was Gilbert Kaxuxuena. He spoke Setswana and also Otjiherero. They told us that they would assist us, but that we should not be seen by anybody else. So we stayed there for more than three weeks without appearing, without seeing the sun. They took care of us very well there. When they told us to go and report, they said they would take us to the police to report.⁴³

What emerges from Ndeikwila's statement is the suspicion that the freedom fighters aroused amongst the Ovaherero. Ndeikwila was situated in a group of Oshiwambo speaking people and, being refugees, the group had learnt to be overcautious in all respects. Nonetheless by receiving temporary accommodation, Ndeikwila and his group managed eventually to escape into exile.

As in the case of Ndeikwila, there were always Herero people who helped the prospective Namibian freedom fighters by providing them with protection and material support. As we will see in the seventh chapter, Mahalapye played an important role for SWAPO as a recruiting ground, drawing people into PLAN or for study abroad.

⁴⁰ Cf. Interview with Alex Meroro, 26.8.08

⁴¹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/141, 26, Extract – Central Intelligence Committee Report, January 1962

⁴² Cf. Interviews with Hidipo Hamutenya, 6.10.08 and John Nankhudu ya Otto, 29.8.08

⁴³ Interview with Samson Ndeikwila, 29.8.08

The question of the Herero chieftainship

With the departure of Samuel Maharero into exile in 1904, the Ovaherero had lost their legitimate chief. Since neither Samuel, nor his son Frederick was able to exercise the duties of the chief of the Ovaherero from Bechuanaland, Hosea Kutako was appointed



Fig. 17: Hosea Kutako (left) and Clemens Kapuuo in the Old Location, Windhoek, in 1964

overall leader of the Herero people in 1920. Hosea Kutako acted as a strong leader of the Ovaherero. He was capable of uniting all Herero factions. However, when he died in 1970 and his secretary, Clemence Kapuuo, was about to be installed as the new chief, old conflicts were reignited. It became evident that there was division among the Ovaherero over the succession; not everybody was in favour of Kapuuo. Some argued that the Ovaherero should follow the example of the Ovambanderu who had recalled their legitimate chief, Munjuku.

They stressed that a direct descendant of Samuel Maharero of the royal Tjamua-ha house was still living in Botswana:

Frederick Katjee Vikunua, the Herero headman of Sehitwa.⁴⁴ It was a question of whether to follow the notion of having a chief legitimised by being born into the royal family, or whether to choose a chief by popular vote.

The leader of the group calling itself “The Society for the Preservation of the House of Tjamua-ha/Maharero” and who supported the idea of installing Frederick (instead of Kapuuo as the new chief), was Bartholomeus Godwin Karuaera who had been secretary to Hosea Kutako’s council.⁴⁵ Accompanied by three other Ovaherero, Karuaera left for Botswana in July 1971 and managed to persuade Frederick to accept the offer of the Herero throne. He spoke to the chief of the Batawana under whom Frederick was serving as headman of Sehitwa. As the Batawana chief had no objections, the four Ovaherero returned to Botswana with Frederick on 2 August 1971.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Cf. Interview with Moses Kandovazu, 25.7.08

⁴⁵ Cf. Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, South West Africa – Namibia

⁴⁶ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/44, Letter from the Commissioner of Police to the PS of the President, 23.10.71

The Botswana authorities were unaware of Frederick's departure. It was only when Clemence Kapuuo personally appealed to Seretse Khama that information about the disunity among the Ovaherero reached Gaborone. Kapuuo claimed that the plans of the Karuarea faction would create disunity among the Ovaherero and demanded that the Botswana authorities should advise Frederick not to accept the offer.⁴⁷ The authorities in Botswana recognised that Frederick was a citizen of Botswana by birth, but they took no further interest in the matter and simply declared that no one was aware of Karuarea's plans.⁴⁸

Frederick, however, was already on his way to Namibia. A great majority of the Ovaherero confirmed Clemence Kapuuo's installation and refused to recognise the newcomer from the Tjamuaha house. Kapuuo was well known among the Ovaherero headmen and he had long rallied support for his goal, the succession of Hosea Kutako. Karuarea lost all his support when he approached the South African administration, which would have preferred a chief of its own choice in preference to Kapuuo.⁴⁹

Political and ethnic cleavages

Controversy surrounds the Ovambanderu claim to be independent of the overall Herero community. In Botswana some of the Herero villages had emerged as Mbanderu-dominated villages, whereas others were predominantly inhabited by the Herero-Herero. In Ngamiland, for example, the Ovaherero mainly lived in Makakung, while Sehitwa could be regarded as a Mbanderu village.

When the distinction between SWAPO, SWANU and NUDO became more evident during the liberation struggle, the Herero communities in Botswana ended up taking sides. Initially, SWAPO and SWANU had been favoured equally, but there were always allegations that SWANU was mainly a party of the Ovambanderu. Admittedly, quite a few of the first leaders, among them Jariretundu Kozonguizi, were Ovambanderu but the non-tribal profile of the organisation would suggest otherwise.⁵⁰ SWAPO, however, increased its support among the Herero communities in Botswana with its increasing military efforts in the liberation struggle. As shown in the following section, members of the Herero communities joined SWAPO during the struggle. Another boost for SWAPO was Munjuku's change of allegiance at the beginning of the 1980s. When the chief of the Ovambanderu who had been a SWANU member for a long time associated himself with SWAPO, the majority of the Ovambanderu in Botswana also decided to join SWAPO.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, OP 27/44, Letter from Clemence Kapuuo to Seretse Khama, 7.10.71

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, OP 27/44, Letter from David Finlay to Clemence Kapuuo, 8.10.71

⁴⁹ Cf. Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, South West Africa – Namibia

⁵⁰ Cf. Emmett 1999: pp. 299–302

⁵¹ Cf. Interview with Moses Ndjarakana, 16.9.08

NUDO still enjoyed much popularity in Botswana. It was the political organisation of the Chief's Council to which many Ovaherero in Botswana felt attached. Although NUDO never became active as a liberation movement, the organisation kept its followers in Botswana. When NUDO became involved in the Turnhalle Conference and consequently merged into the DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance), African spokespeople for the internal settlement in Namibia tried to convince the Ovaherero in Botswana to return home. This intensified the split between those Ovaherero in Botswana who supported the liberation struggle and those who thought independence was about to come with the Turnhalle Conference. Moses Ndjarakana, at that time already among the SWAPO supporting community in Botswana, describes the situation:

There were divisions, politically, in terms of social life and so on. They [i.e. the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu in Botswana] had distinctly different agendas as to Namibia. I remember at one time the Herero[s] were agitating to come back to Namibia. Especially during the seventies, at the time when NUDO was more aligned to the ruling authorities at the time. So they felt the ground was ripe to come and lead a normal life in Namibia. The propaganda machinery of the Apartheid system had worked to convince them that life was normal. But they weren't allowed to go with their livestock. The government of Botswana would not be party to that kind of an arrangement. Even the Apartheid government was agitating towards the government of Botswana to allow the people to come back.⁵²

The situation in Botswana between Ovaherero and Ovambanderu (in Namibia) never deteriorated, however, to the same extent as when the Herero Reserves were polarised between SWANU and NUDO supporters in the end of the 1970s.⁵³

Recruitments in Botswana

There were those members of the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu communities in Botswana who were very much aware of the events taking place in the land of their forefathers. They had always followed the developments in South West Africa and the commencement of the liberation struggle was an opportunity for them to actively take part in the endeavours of their relatives across the border. The resistance of their forefathers had become part of their identity by oral tradition, and they were consequently open to approaches from the Namibian liberation movements, in particular from SWAPO, which started to actively prepare the armed struggle at the beginning of the 1960s. Kazenambo Kazenambo, a Herero-Mbanderu, who originated from Maun, remembers:

For Herero[s] and Mbanderu[s] the liberation struggle had never ended, the war of resistance never stopped. It was just a question of looking for a platform. [...] So these

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Cf. Interview with Rihupisa Kandando, 20.8.08

people just continued. The psychology of war and going back never stopped amongst the Herero[s] and Mbanderu[s]. [...] So it was just like they reacted automatically. Their mind-set was already prepared that way.⁵⁴

During the formative stages of the Namibian liberation struggle, it was, of course, largely a question of exposure to the ideas of the Namibian liberation movements. We shall see in the next chapter that SWANU too was trying to raise awareness among the Herero communities in the early 1960s. Mostly though the Herero community in Mahalapye was being influenced by prospective SWAPO freedom fighters shortly after the formation of SWAPO. This was due to the presence of former South West African mine workers living in the area after their return from South Africa and, in particular, to the activities of SWAPO representative, Maxton Joseph Mutongulume.

Maxton Joseph had been in the Bechuanaland Protectorate since 1961 when he spent some time in Mahalapye with the community of the Ovaherero.⁵⁵ Until 1962 he organised a group of seven Ovaherero who subsequently received military training under the auspices of SWAPO. These included Hanguaue Katjipuka Kavezeri, a PLAN commander until he died on the battlefield, and Kaleb Tjipahura, both of whom held high ranks in PLAN.⁵⁶ There were a few recruits from the Herero communities in Ngamiland, among them Kahaka Kaikorama, the son of the Herero headman of Makakung, who managed to obtain a UN scholarship to the Soviet Union through SWAPO and later became deputy secretary of justice of SWAPO.⁵⁷ Benjamin Maekopo from Maun in Ngamiland, who received a scholarship through SWAPO, recalls his recruitment:

[...] while I was in standard three or four that's when I learned of SWAPO. In fact Maxton [Joseph] came to Francistown. And if I remember well I left the school and went to meet him in Francistown because he was talking of taking us for further education. So I went to meet him in Francistown where he promised that joining SWAPO you would gain a lot. You are not only a member of SWAPO, you go to a school, you go to a high school. Then I said: How can I leave this opportunity? After all, my forefathers are from Namibia. There is no problem between Botswana and South West Africa. These are people fighting for our independence. So I joined SWAPO in 1961.⁵⁸

The link between the Ovaherero in Botswana and those in Namibia was a crucial factor when young Ovaherero in Botswana made up their minds to become active in SWAPO. On the other hand, a certain degree of opportunism could be detected among the young

⁵⁴ Interview with Kazenambo Kazenambo, 25.8.08

⁵⁵ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/141, 23, Inward Telegram from the High Commissioner to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15.2.63

⁵⁶ Cf. Interview with Alex Meroro, 26.8.08

⁵⁷ Cf. Interviews with Elias Raua Tjiriange, 27.7.08 and Mbeuta ua-Ndjarakana, 22.8.08

⁵⁸ Interview with Benjamin Maekopo, 20.9.08

Herero recruits. As far as academic study was concerned opportunities in the Bechuanaland Protectorate were limited. However, with the emergence of the United Nations Scholarship Programme for Namibia, the Ovaherero in Botswana had the possibility of further education, as long as they declared themselves to be members of one of the Namibian liberation movements. One must of course not forget that those who joined from Botswana would be giving up more than their relatives across the border. They already lived in a country where racial equality was about to be achieved and therefore the question of how they could personally benefit from a SWAPO membership might not have been completely unjustified.

When the armed struggle of PLAN intensified, SWAPO increasingly received support from the Herero communities. This could, however, not be done overtly because the authorities were not supportive of the idea of young Botswana citizens leaving the country to join the liberation struggle of another territory. Nonetheless, some Ovaherero, both in Ngamiland and in Mahalapye, became political activists. They received propaganda material from SWAPO such as the journal "Combatant" and made efforts to recruit people for SWAPO underground.⁵⁹ From the middle of the 1970s almost up until the end of the liberation struggle, SWAPO organisers recruited among the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu in Botswana. Some of these Ovaherero and Ovambanderu recruits returned to Namibia once independence was achieved and held high government office during the time of this research. They included Kazenambo Kazenambo, Mbeuta ua-Ndjarakana and Moses Ndjarakana.⁶⁰

Among those activists that recruited people from the young Ovaherero and Ovambanderu in Botswana were Alex Meroro, Justice Muunyo and Lucas Tjitunga. Lucas Tjitunga emphasises that, for him, being employed by the government as a teacher, the recruitment was anything but a simple business:

It was not an easy thing. It was a risk, really risky. I knew that I might be expelled from my job if the authorities discovered that I was engaged in such activities. So I was not approaching the students. I started with one student who would speak to others. He would speak to one. When he spoke to one he would not speak to them as a group, even when they were two. So when information came out he could deny because there were only two. When he was convinced that a person was interested he would refer the person to me. I would only talk to one person, not in groups. When I was convinced that a person was interested he was given materials and t-shirts. I was even putting books into the library in Maun and I told people that they could go into the library to read more about SWAPO. So they got attracted.⁶¹

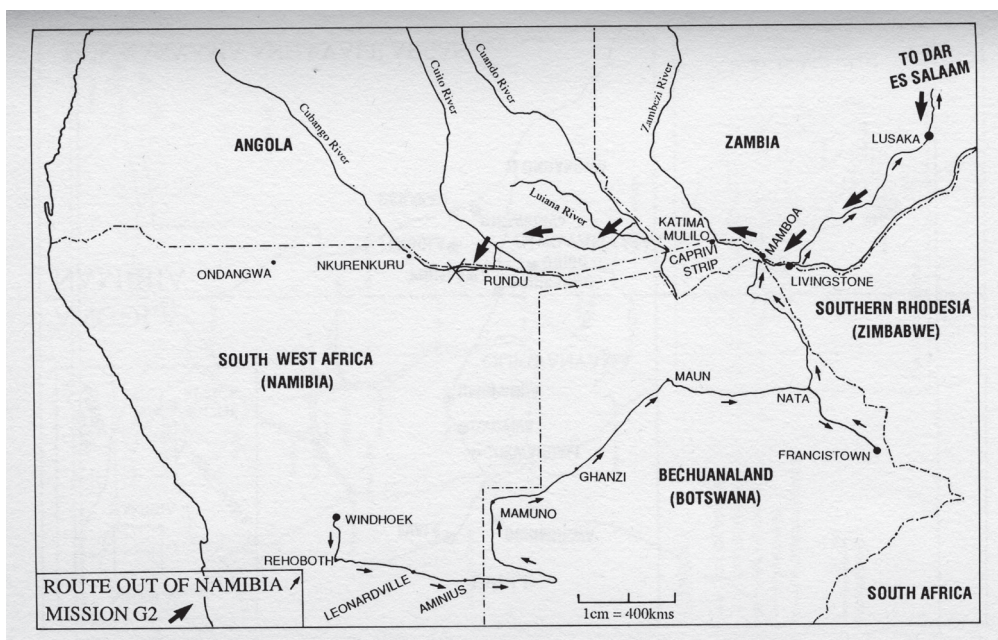
⁵⁹ Cf. Interview with Mbeuta ua-Ndjarakana, 22.8.08

⁶⁰ Cf. Interview with Alex Meroro, 26.8.08

⁶¹ Interview with Lucas Tjitunga, 20.8.08

Tjitunga's explanations follow the rules of conspiracy framed by Auguste Blanqui and, later, Che Guevara. Blanqui, a French revolutionary whose name is closely tied to the three most important revolutions in the 19th century, had alluded to the importance of secret organisations when planning an uprising or a revolution.⁶² Che Guevara emphasised that in a secret organisation no member should know more than absolutely necessary and no member should talk to anybody about what he knew.⁶³ This principle seemed to be strictly adhered to when SWAPO organisers tried to recruit members from the Herero communities in Botswana.

Admittedly, the number of SWAPO members who were recruited from the communities in Botswana remained small in comparison to the overall numbers of PLAN fighters. It does, however, indicate that there was a certain level of support that exceeded the basic but vital support of Namibian freedom fighters on their way into exile.



Map 3: The route of Helao Shityuwete into exile to Botswana and Tanzania in 1964 and his return as a SWAPO soldier in 1966 as a member of Mission G2

⁶² Cf. Münster 1971: p. 23

⁶³ Cf. Hahlweg 1968: p. 184

Support from the Batswana and others

The Ovaherero, who had fled South West Africa after the 1904 War, had received hospitality mainly from the Batawana and the Bangwato. The territory of the Bangwato, however, was far from Namibia, therefore Namibian refugees and freedom fighters on their way into exile did not depend as much on the support from the tribe of the Khomas. One exception was the transit of Hans Beukes, who had left South West Africa in June 1959 in order to give evidence on the Rehoboth community at the United Nations. Beukes was delayed in Bechuanaland where he awaited his visa for the United States from Salisbury. It was beyond British power to provide a document for Beukes that would have enabled him to proceed. He was given accommodation in Serowe and Palapye and spent some of the time with Seretse Khama until he received the necessary documents to continue on his journey at the end of August.⁶⁴

This territory, traditionally inhabited by the Batawana, namely western and north-western Botswana, was an unavoidable transit area for most Namibians on their way into exile. During colonial days the African Authorities had a say in who was allowed to stay in their territory. For most Namibians passing through it was not all that difficult to be accepted and helped by the Batawana, although it was rarely necessary, as the Ovaherero were always the first contact people they came across. Nonetheless, Claudius Kandjou claims that SWANU had an excellent relationship with Chief Letsholathebe⁶⁵ who had assumed office in December 1964 as Chief of the Batawana. Yet his predecessor, his mother Pulane Moremi, was deeply concerned when it came to accepting the big group of Ovaherero that entered Bechuanaland in March 1964.⁶⁶ This group, however, was an exception and will be picked out as a central theme in the eighth chapter. The relationship between the Batawana and the Ovaherero in Ngamiland had always been tense. This might have contributed to the fact that the group around Munjuku and Munamava became deeply involved in the Namibian struggle. In a letter to Jariretundu Kozonguizi in August 1960, Daniel Munamava complained about the conflict-laden situation and from his words one can see that the strained relationship with the Batawana possibly increased the determination among some activists in Ngamiland:

We are still fighting. The Batawana don't want us here [...] trying to chase our chief away [...] The Batawana have divided us and we see that they want to kill (destroy) our tribe [...] I ask you to get me a scholarship so that I can learn to fight.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Cf. British National Archives, DO 35/10616, 74+75, Inward Telegram from the High Commissioner to the Commonwealth Relations Officer, 29.8.59

⁶⁵ Cf. Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08

⁶⁶ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/460, 20, Central Intelligence Committee Report, No. 3, 1964

⁶⁷ British National Archives, DO 157/9, 4, Central Intelligence Committee Report, No.6 (1960)

Interestingly, Munamava equated obtaining a scholarship with military training. This illustrates the lack of understanding of the means by which independence should be achieved at that early stage of the liberation struggle and also foreshadowed the reality that for many SWAPO members the active participation in the military fight for independence would have priority over educational advancement.

It was of vital importance when crossing the border from Namibia into Botswana to know your way well. In the vastness of the Kalahari it was not an easy undertaking to keep track of the route to exile. Furthermore, some of the refugees had left in great haste without undergoing much preparation. Helao Shityuwete, who left in a group of four in 1964, frankly admits this when recalling his exposure to the bush:

It was also the time that we realised that we were ill-prepared, no water, no food, nothing, no blanket, nothing. I can't even think of what we had with us. So it was quite a terrible situation.⁶⁸

In many instances, however, the San, often referred to as bushmen, proved to be very helpful by guiding the prospective freedom fighters to the first villages in western Botswana. The San have frequently been referred to as "clever people" by former freedom fighters, as they compensated for the lack of preparation of many freedom fighters on their way into exile.⁶⁹ Helao Shityuwete's group also took advantage of a "bushman" escort. In his autobiography, Shityuwete writes:

Having been born and bred in the Kalahari Desert, our guide was an experienced man. Before we crossed into Bechuanaland, he lined us up in a single file, then led the way and told us to step in his footsteps.⁷⁰

The San helped to identify those places where crossing of the border was easier and where the refugees would not be detected by border patrols. In some cases they helped to find water when the refugees were close to dehydration. Andries Booys who left Namibia in 1964 remembered:

The Bushman showed us the way. Later we had no more water. Then we rested. The Bushman took out his pipe, smoked, and after an hour he said that we should move again. Now we were in Botswana. There were no fences there. It was a new day now. Then the Bushman said: Maybe you guys rest here, I'll be back. He was away for four hours, then he came back. We don't know where he got the water from that he had. But he came back with water.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Interview with Helao Shityuwete, 15.9.08

⁶⁹ Cf. Interviews with Andries Booys, 10.8.08 and Sacky Amunyele, 18.9.08

⁷⁰ Shityuwete 1990: p. 82

⁷¹ Interview with Andries Booys, 10.8.08

In many respects, the Namibian refugees were simply at the mercy of the environment and depended on help from people along the way. When they entered Botswana from the western side coming from Gobabis, they were well received by the Batswana in nearby villages. Be it the chief of Kule, Karakubis, or Ncojane, they all readily received the refugees. The refugees had no choice but to ask for accommodation in the first village they entered, which was usually granted during their transit.⁷² There were no prearranged agreements; it was a matter of courtesy that the chiefs from the villages in western Botswana received the refugees without reservation.

There were people in Botswana who were actively engaged in helping the refugees by providing transport for them. A famous example was Henry Jankie. During the early days of the liberation struggle, there were not many cars and trucks travelling between the Namibian–Botswana border and Ghanzi, so every opportunity had to be seized. Henry Jankie was a councillor, later a member of parliament for the Botswana Democratic Party, and he was one of the few people who owned a truck. He was transporting people between Karakubis and Ghanzi until South African agents found out what he was doing and allegedly destroyed his vehicle.⁷³

Botswana's Vice-President at that time, Quett Masire, hosted Namibian refugees on his farm. The farm was situated near Kalkfontein, about 50 kilometres east of Karakubis. The refugees had come to know that this was the only farm not owned by whites at the time, and that they would be safe.⁷⁴ Masire himself did not stay at the farm, this way he missed Mrs Nujoma passing through his farm on her way into exile at one time.⁷⁵

During the time when Ghanzi was a small outpost in the Kalahari, Gobabis (located in Namibia) was the commercial centre for western Botswana. This is why local businessmen and farmers crossed the border occasionally. Some of them helped the refugees with transport when they were on their way back from Gobabis.⁷⁶ However, the refugees could never be quite sure about the whites. Quite a few of them were Afrikaners who were sympathetic to South Africa. Ben Amathila had a rather unpleasant experience when he encountered some white cattle drivers in the area of Charles Hill,⁷⁷ and even Philipp Steenkamp, District Commissioner in Francistown between 1962 and 1967, admitted that the whites in Botswana were “almost solidly behind South Africa.”⁷⁸

⁷² Cf. Interview with Charles Pieter, 16.8.08

⁷³ Cf. Interviews with Quett Masire, 27.6.08 and Charles Pieter, 16.8.08

⁷⁴ Cf. Interviews with Charles Pieter, 16.8.08 and Bashi Thiite, 28.7.08

⁷⁵ Cf. Interview with Quett Masire, 27.6.08

⁷⁶ Cf. Interview with Bashi Thiite, 28.7.08

⁷⁷ Cf. Interview with Ben Amathila, 6.8.08

⁷⁸ Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

Although Steenkamp's remark referred mainly to the areas around Francistown (where many whites were in favour of the incorporation of some parts of the protectorate into South Africa or Rhodesia),⁷⁹ encounters with white people was always a risk for the Namibian refugees, especially when awareness had risen among the Afrikaners that there were now refugee movements from Namibia into Botswana. In general, however, individuals in Bo-



Fig. 18: On the outskirts of Francistown in 1965

tswana, especially in the western part of the country, where help was urgently needed, sympathised with the Namibian refugees and gave them the necessary support.

Political parties

Political parties have always claimed they would address the needs of the marginalised and poor in society. During colonial times, the indigenous African populations represented this very group. As there were no major differences among the various African colonies, feelings of pan-Africanism had developed among marginalised groups across borders. These feelings were often addressed by the political parties that were formed in the dying days of colonialism in most African territories. It comes therefore as no surprise that the political parties in Botswana, well aware of the occurrences in Namibia, had the liberation struggle in neighbouring territories on their agenda. It will thus be worthwhile at this point to focus on the help that Namibian liberation movements received from the political parties in Bechuanaland and Botswana respectively. We start with the parties that ended up in opposition after the first elections in 1965 and only then move on to the ruling party BDP, which being the party in government, was limited in their ability to overtly support organisations like SWAPO and the ANC. The agitation of the other political parties is therefore more important in this respect.

⁷⁹ Cf. Grant/Ramsay 1987: p. 193

Bechuanaland People's Party (BPP)

Having been greatly influenced by both the ANC and PAC during its foundation, the BPP appeared the natural ally of all southern African liberation movements. Most notably, the radical rhetoric of the first vice-president of the party, Philipp Matante, resembled the speeches many leaders of African liberation movements gave in exile. The BPP enjoyed most of its popularity in Francistown, the biggest town in Botswana at the time, where the southern African refugees were hosted in the "White House", the centre of activity of the liberation movements in Botswana. Initially, the BPP almost regarded itself as a liberation movement. The acceptance of the African Liberation Committee (see chapter 4, p. 72 ff.) certainly reinforced this conviction. Even before the split of the party, the most charismatic leader was Philipp Matante. He was a political rabble-rouser and many Namibian refugees thought he would become the first president of an independent Botswana when they witnessed his rallies in Francistown.⁸⁰

The British, who regarded the BPP as a threat, became alarmed when they found out that in 1961 Matante had established contact with Mburumba Kerina and Sam Nujoma. The British observed that the BPP maintained contacts with other African liberation movements as well and feared that they would fight more radically against British colonialism if they were continuously influenced from outside.⁸¹ Contacts between the BPP and various liberation movements had not only been created through the transit of freedom fighters across Bechuanaland, but also as a result of BPP participation in pan-African conferences, which were attended by liberation movements from southern Africa and in which the BPP demanded support as much as SWAPO, SWANU or the ANC.⁸² As a result of these early contacts, Mburumba Kerina, who was already in America at that time, assisted Matante in establishing contacts with the American Committee on Africa in order to obtain sponsors for the party. Sam Nujoma arranged two scholarships in Tanzania for students from the BPP.⁸³

Most of the time, however, the Namibian liberation movements were reliant on the BPP rather than vice versa. Philipp Matante regularly held rallies in Francistown and SWAPO supporters, who were staying at the White House at that time, attended them and were occasionally allowed to address the people as well.⁸⁴ This not only served the purpose of showing solidarity, but also created awareness among the Batswana of the lib-

⁸⁰ Cf. Interview with Jesaya Nyamu, 25.8.08

⁸¹ Cf. British National Archives, DO 157/9, 15–19, Central Intelligence Committee Reports, No. 7–11, 1961

⁸² Cf. Interview with Charles Kauraisa, 18.9.08

⁸³ Cf. British National Archives, DO 157/9, 19, Central Intelligence Committee Report, No. 11, 1961

⁸⁴ Cf. Interview with Jesaya Nyamu, 25.8.08

eration struggle thereby supporting the cause of Philipp Matante and his party. SWAPO was learning a great deal about political agitation. While Lazarus Sankala, who joined SWAPO in Botswana in 1962 after he had come back from the mines in South Africa, acknowledges that it was Philipp Matante who made him aware of the greater relevance of the fight for freedom,⁸⁵ Theo-Ben Gurirab precisely recalls his encounter with Philipp Matante, when he was in Francistown in 1962 on his way into exile:

The big party was the one of Seretse Khama [...]. There was a more militant one of Philipp Matante. Of course we were drawn to that one. It was Philipp Matante's area. Even though we used to organise political rallies in Walvis Bay more than in Windhoek at that time, the real political rabble-rousing is what I learned in Bechuanaland. We had some whiskey with this fellow in a hotel and then he would just rally people in an open square. He used to address rallies alternating between Setswana and English. He had just come back from attending the All-African Congress organised by Kwame Nkrumah in Accra. From there he had passed through Tanganyika. So we were looking at somebody who had actually physically touched and met Nkrumah, Nyerere and so on. One of the words that I learned from him there was the word "harlot" – prostitute. He was saying the exploitation and the brutality of the exploitation by the white man had turned their women into harlots.⁸⁶

No doubt Philipp Matante left a permanent impression on some of the refugees and freedom fighters. This would mainly fit into the category of ideological support. There was little that the BPP could do though to provide material support to the liberation movements. Edwin S. Munger pointed to the importance of the donation of three Landrovers to the party from Ghana in the early 1960s.⁸⁷ More than anything else, this showed that financially the party was not well off, depending on foreign donors as much as the southern African liberation movements. The BPP supported the idea of the liberation struggle and gave logistical assistance, but their means were limited. Godfrey Gaoseb, who later became SWANU representative in Tanzania, puts it in a simple sentence: "They were sympathetic, not helpful."⁸⁸

Nevertheless, when the Matante/Motsete faction of the BPP held its annual conference in Francistown at the end of December 1962, they invited delegates from other southern African countries, among them SWAPO representatives. During this conference a joint letter was produced in which the protectorate government was called upon to stop the incursions of South African security personnel into the High Commission Territories.⁸⁹ This was merely a symbolic gesture; the British made no effort to respond to the calls.

⁸⁵ Cf. Interview with Lazarus Sankala, 9.9.08

⁸⁶ Interview with Theo-Ben Gurirab, 10.9.08

⁸⁷ Cf. Munger 1965: p. 23

⁸⁸ Interview with Godfrey Gaoseb, 11.8.08

⁸⁹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/460, 1, Central Intelligence Committee Report, No.1, 1963

SWAPO representative, Maxton Joseph, remained in close contact with Matante and SWAPO benefited from the BPP members' knowledge of Francistown and surroundings. As an opposition party though, the BPP was ultimately not in a position to give much help to the Namibian liberation struggle.

Botswana Independence Party (BIP)

The BIP was in a similarly difficult position. It did not even have parliamentary representation until 1969. Due to the two residences of its leader, Motsamai Mpho, in Maun and in eastern Botswana, the BIP was more active in Ngamiland and Palapye. It was

an advantage for the Namibian liberation movements that Daniel Munamava was a BIP member, temporarily even a member of the executive of the party⁹⁰ and thus able to direct attention within the BIP to the Namibian liberation struggle. Motsamai Mpho, who had joined the ANC during his studies in South Africa in the 1950s,⁹¹ played his part too in creating awareness around the importance of Namibia's fight for freedom among his party members. Having a greater presence in Ngamiland, the BIP members were in a better position to facilitate the



Fig. 19: The Botswana politician Motsamai Mpho with his daughter in Palapye, July 1965

refugee transport, helping Daniel Munamava with the accommodation and transport of Sam Nujoma at a time before the party was officially in existence.⁹²

For Motsamai Mpho himself it was more difficult to become active in support of the refugees. He was a well-known opposition figure, so could not overtly host refugees or provide transport, although he would not have been doing anything illegal. The BIP fully understood that the territory of Botswana could not be used as a launching pad for guerrilla activities. Claudius Kandjou, who went into exile in 1965 and then became part

⁹⁰ Cf. Interviews with Motsamai Mpho, 25.6.08 and L M Sethoko, 25.6.08

⁹¹ Cf. Edge 1996: p. 30

⁹² Cf. Interviews with L M Sethoko, 25.6.08 and Gaditshwane Mmutle, 26.7.08

of SWANU's External Council, describes the constraints the refugees were facing when coming into contact with Mpho:

The government of Botswana was always interested in finding out what Mpho was up to. If you were associated with him, of course you were attracting attention to yourself.⁹³

If there were alternative options, a refugee would not contact Mpho directly, although he had laid down the guideline that it was the absolute duty of any member of his party to support the freedom fighters by all necessary means: "Whoever was a BIP member knew that a refugee was his responsibility."⁹⁴

There was little material help the BIP could provide. Party funds were limited and did not even suffice for the party activities. As a result, it was only when a few individuals took money out of their own purse that the provision of transport could be paid for.⁹⁵ Motsamai Mpho tried to petition the British authorities in Bechuanaland for support of the freedom fighters entering the protectorate. In a letter signed by him and the president of the Mpho-section of the BPP, B.D. Macheng (shortly before the BIP was officially formed), in September 1963, Mpho accused the British government of "behaving as a carbon copy of the white government of the Republic of South Africa by openly supporting the racial policy of the white South Africa" because it would constantly be denying political asylum to genuine political refugees. Mpho and Macheng further protested against the infiltration of South African police as had become obvious in the case of the abduction of Kenneth Abrahams and his group.⁹⁶

This letter of protest made waves within the colonial administration. Mpho cited the annual report of the Bechuanaland Government Police stating that more than 300 refugees had been deported from the protectorate. After some disquiet within the protectorate administration, the High Commissioner internally gave assurances that no single political refugee had ever been refused asylum.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Mpho's opinion had a clear impact on the colonial office bearers. Only later were they reassured that there was no longer any need to fear Mpho; they felt he was not capable of winning a majority within the BPP.⁹⁸

As with the BPP, the BIP came to the conclusion that SWAPO was the Namibian liberation movement that primarily deserved its support. It did host and help refugees from

⁹³ Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08

⁹⁴ Interview with Motsamai Mpho, 25.6.08

⁹⁵ Cf. Interview with Gaditshwane Mmutle, 26.7.08

⁹⁶ British National Archives, CO 1048/531, 29, Letter from the BPP to the British Secretary of State, 4.9.63

⁹⁷ Cf. Ibid., 33, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24.10.63

⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid.

SWANU, and Mpho was in close contact with Mburumba Kerina at some stage and even tried to intervene in the case of the NUDO refugees in Makunda in 1964. As SWAPO evolved as the only liberation movement being actively engaged in the armed struggle and as it enjoyed the widest international support, the BIP too focused on SWAPO. Mpho explains:

We never differentiated between the different Namibian organisations, we were helping everybody. But I supported SWAPO because SWAPO seemed to be carrying the struggle from home properly. I looked at SWAPO as a political party which was not sectional or tribal. I looked at SWAPO as a national organisation. But I did not get into their struggles. But SWAPO was business-minded. By business-minded I mean that they were serious with their job.⁹⁹

To a certain extent Mpho's assessment might have been caused by SWAPO's propaganda that Mpho and others were exposed to at international conferences. It has to be said, however, that the BIP's focus on SWAPO did not impact on any of the later disputes between SWANU and SWAPO. Hidipo Hamutenya, one of the early SWAPO members who left for exile, depicted Mpho's role realistically: "He was sympathetic, he talked to us and he wished us good luck."¹⁰⁰

Botswana National Front (BNF)

When the BNF came into being in 1965 the first wave of Namibian refugees was already on its way through Botswana. Early contacts between party founder Kenneth Koma and the representatives of various southern African liberation movements had been made at conferences in independent African states or in the Soviet Union where Koma had studied. This established a certain familiarity between the freedom fighters and the BNF members who, as did the members of the liberation movements, referred to themselves as comrades. Kenneth Koma had been greatly influenced by his studies in the Soviet Union and set a high value on ideological clarity. He recognised the link between the struggle of the BNF in opposition and the fight for independence of the people in the surrounding territories. He emphasised that:

the BNF is of necessity part of the stream of the liberation struggle that is being waged in Africa. We do not intend to make independent Botswana a base for military attack on any of our neighbours nor do we intend to make it a base for subversive activities against any other state.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Interview with Motsamai Mpho, 25.6.08

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Hidipo Hamutenya, 6.10.08

¹⁰¹ Botswana National Archives, BNB 8971, Botswana National Front, p. 38

Again there was the understanding that the territory of Botswana could not be used as a launching pad for any military activities, but still the BNF felt, due to ideological overlaps with the objectives of the liberation movements, a responsibility to support the struggle in the neighbouring territories. Lemogang Ntime, a long-time member of the party's executive, comments on the attitude of his party towards the liberation struggle:

[...] the BNF has always believed that our independence will be incomplete without the independence of the other southern African countries. We always believed that Botswana occupies an important part of southern Africa. We believed that our struggle should also be the struggle of the people of Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe.¹⁰²

The question was, however, how the BNF could give practical support to the liberation movements. Although the party became the official opposition with the elections in 1969, its position was no more comfortable than that of the BPP or the BIP. With regard to Namibia, the party expressed its views, clearly stressing that the occupation of Namibia was illegal.¹⁰³ The BNF made a clear distinction by supporting SWAPO as the only official Namibian liberation movement. Lemogang Ntime substantiates this ideological affinity to SWAPO. He maintains that:

we didn't recognise SWANU as authentic representatives in terms of ideology. We believed that SWAPO was more in the right direction, and its policy, as contained in their papers including public declarations of principles, constituted, what we believed could bring about social equity and could create a national democratic state. [...] If you look at SWAPO, you would realise that it was not formed essentially for socialism or socialistic ideas but it has always been anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism. Therefore SWAPO and the BNF cooperated fully [...]¹⁰⁴

The basis on which the BNF could claim to be on the same side ideologically as SWAPO, as opposed to SWANU is disputable. After all, it was difficult to truly establish the ideological objectives of the liberation movements during the liberation struggle. Of course, SWAPO was more aligned to the Soviet Union and the BNF too had good contacts with Moscow, whereas SWANU was in the Chinese camp. At that stage, the effects of OAU recognition were clearly visible. Yet, in this regard, it seems more important that the BNF only became involved in the Namibian liberation struggle at a later stage after it had become evident that SWAPO was the leading force in Namibia's fight for independence. It may have been this factor that facilitated the BNF's decision to align itself with SWAPO. It appeared likely that the BNF could well have developed close ties with SWANU as

¹⁰² Interview with Lemogang Ntime, 13.6.08

¹⁰³ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

both organisations set a high value on the theoretical approach of the liberation struggle and could thus have cross-fertilised each other ideologically.

Having adopted the status of official opposition, the BNF increasingly assumed the function of the BPP as a radical party and would aim at adopting the exact opposite position to that of the government. It consequently attracted a number of young Ovaherero who felt that they were in good hands in the BNF.¹⁰⁵ This certainly helped the BNF to continue with its support for the Namibian liberation struggle.

However, the BNF's support for SWAPO was limited. No former Namibian freedom fighter denied the BNF its general sympathy or its desire to support their struggle,¹⁰⁶ however, this did not comprise much more than organisational and logistical assistance. On occasion, the BNF members housed Namibian refugees and helped them to proceed.¹⁰⁷ But, in general, the BNF suffered from financial difficulties as an opposition party. They could not afford the luxury of doing much more than morally and ideologically support the Namibian liberation struggle. It was only in 1994 that the BNF obtained a double-digit number of seats in parliament.¹⁰⁸ Before that it proved a great challenge for the party to have its voice heard on any political issue, and the liberation struggle in the neighbouring territories was no exception in this regard.

Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)

Since the government of Botswana only consisted of people from the BDP, the party basically had to deal with the same constraints as did the decision-makers in Gaborone. Understandably, BDP politicians could not preach a different message to what was being decided in government. They therefore had to abstain from getting too closely involved with prospective freedom fighters. Certainly, the handling of the refugee issue by the BDP government did by no means, as was shown in the fourth chapter, prohibit the movements of refugees. But conditions such as the no-politics clause and the ban on military activities put the BDP in a less sympathetic light from the point of view of the liberation movements. In contrast to the BDP the opposition parties did not have access to a national platform, so that the engagement with the refugees offered them a rare opportunity to make their presence felt. Even BDP politicians did not doubt that there was some kind of co-operation between the liberation movements and the opposition parties, as Archibald Mogwe, Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President and later Minister of Foreign Affairs, explains:

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Interview with Lucas Tjitunga, 20.8.08

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Interviews with Leonard Ipumbu, 15.9.08 and Alex Meroro, 26.8.08

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Interview with Lemogang Ntime, 13.6.08

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Molomo/Molefe 2005: p. 105

The opposition expected us to do more. They were not responsible, they could do anything. I'm sure the opposition parties helped the refugees. But we didn't go out to find out.¹⁰⁹

This statement again reflects the government approach of turning a blind eye to the activities of the refugees. By doing so the government could demonstrate that it was not too tough on the liberation movements. It would, however, have proved impossible to check on all the contacts between the opposition parties and the prospective freedom fighters.

Individual politicians from the BDP developed closer links with some liberation movements. Amos Dambe, the organising secretary of the BDP, even joined some meetings that SWANU held in Ngamiland in 1964.¹¹⁰ Contacts between BDP politicians and members of the Namibian liberation movements were infrequent. From the point of view of the Namibian freedom fighters there was no animosity between Domkrag (the nickname of the BDP) and SWAPO or SWANU.¹¹¹

The Namibian liberation struggle in Botswana's domestic politics

The position of the Botswana government on the situation in Namibia was never a cause for debate. In general, the BDP did not attach great significance to international issues in its early election manifestos.¹¹² More important were the presence and the transit of refugees through Botswana. The British had already established a "no politics" condition in most instances, which barred refugees and freedom fighters from engaging in politics in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The independent government continued this policy, which proved to be a tactical move because most of the members of the southern African liberation movements would have associated themselves with the more radical elements of the party system in Botswana, that is with the opposition. In fact, the refugees were immediately looked upon with suspicion when it became known that they had contacts with the opposition parties.¹¹³ Additionally, it was a simple measure to keep out of further trouble. Interestingly, the well-founded assumption that the refugees would have been closer to the political opposition parties is in sharp contrast to Georg Simmel's famous analysis on the nature of foreigners. He assigns a certain objectivity to foreigners as they would not be involved in any conflict, which had arisen before their arrival.¹¹⁴ The objectivity of foreigners is logical and undoubted in most cases but, since we are dealing with foreigners of an explicitly political character, it is easy to accept that they would rather affiliate to those

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Archibald Mogwe, 22.7.08

¹¹⁰ Cf. Interviews with Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08 and Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08

¹¹¹ Cf. Interview with Theo-Ben Gurirab, 10.9.08

¹¹² Cf. Polhelmus 1985: p. 233

¹¹³ Cf. Tlou/Parsons/Henderson 1995: p. 254

¹¹⁴ Cf. Simmel 1908: p. 510

residents they thought would hold similar political beliefs. The opposition parties' criticism of government treatment of freedom fighters and refugees did not cause the government to suppress every contact between political activists of the opposition parties and the freedom fighters. The government was well aware of the contacts people such as Matante and Mpho had with the members of the liberation movements but, as long as these contacts did not escalate into a threat for the BDP dominance in Botswana, there was no reason to intervene. After all, the government knew well that the opposition parties were in a more comfortable position to help as far as diplomatic constraints were concerned.

Mburumba Kerina, however, overstepped the boundary when in 1964 he tried to be the puppet master for the opposition in the election campaign for the elections in March 1965. At first he regarded himself as an "advisor" to the election campaign of the BDP. Then he allegedly made use of the information gained in the BDP campaign by conveying it to the opposition and secretly campaigning against Seretse Khama.¹¹⁵ Kerina was subsequently declared a prohibited immigrant, although this may have been due to his other activities (see chapter eight) and the fact that almost all refugees who left the country were declared prohibited immigrants.

The representatives of SWAPO and SWANU generally adhered to the clause to abstain from politics. Occasionally some refugees participated in the rallies of the opposition parties as individuals, but otherwise there was no interference in domestic politics by the SWAPO office in Francistown. The prevailing belief among the Namibian liberation movements was that the Batswana should themselves decide on the party they wished to support.¹¹⁶ The presence of refugees and prospective freedom fighters was an issue in domestic politics in Botswana, but the liberation movements refrained from any active involvement that might have altered the constellation of power.

International aid agencies and welfare organisations

The attitude towards the welfare organisations in Bechuanaland and Botswana

Both in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and in Botswana the work of the various aid agencies and welfare organisations dealing with refugees from Botswana's neighbouring territories served two purposes. The government first in Mafikeng and then in Gaborone, was neither logistically nor financially able to provide the refugees with the necessary support. The administration therefore had to rely on the assistance of national and international organisations that were more experienced in dealing with refugees and that had

¹¹⁵ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Confidential Report on the political activities of Mburumba Kerina, December 1966

¹¹⁶ Cf. Interviews with Theo-Ben Gurirab, 10.9.08 and Peter Katjavivi, 20.11.07

more resources. Government officials never doubted that Botswana would not have managed the large numbers of refugees from Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique without the valuable contributions of the welfare organisations.¹¹⁷ The government had, however, to ensure that the help given to refugees by these aid organisations was confined to their basic needs. The risk that potential refugees might be attracted by an overly generous provision could lead to the possibility of an even larger influx of refugees.

As the welfare organisations were either already in the country or actively approaching the government to obtain permission to operate in Bechuanaland or Botswana respectively, the government felt obliged to restrict their work rather than actively encouraging them. Occasionally, this led to feelings of uncertainty among the refugee organisations as it was not always clear which position the government would take up concerning certain relief efforts.¹¹⁸ In the case of the Makunda refugees in 1964 (see chapter eight), for example, the protectorate government was keen to place the responsibility on Amnesty International to provide subsistence, while ensuring that living conditions for the refugees in Makunda did not foster unrealistic expectations. This was done in order to prevent recurrences of refugee movements.¹¹⁹

In another instance, the British administration was approached by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Having obtained funds from private American donors, the IRC applied for permission to run a project for the benefit of the refugees in Bechuanaland in 1965. As this took place during the period of internal self-government, the government under Seretse Khama was consulted. The British undertook further investigation of the IRC's reputation. Even though they acknowledged that the IRC was an organisation of good standing, the application was declined on the grounds that other organisations were already engaged in refugee work through which financial assistance could be channelled.¹²⁰

The reservation of the government did, however, not always lead to negative replies when approached by welfare organisations. In July 1965 the International Refugee Council of Zambia (IRCOZ) requested permission from the British officer in command to construct two buildings for temporary shelter for the refugees in Kazungula awaiting their transport to Zambia. The British were hesitant because they felt that this might encourage further refugee movements.¹²¹ Yet, after long discussions the internal self-government

¹¹⁷ Cf. Interviews with Daniel Kwelagobe, 26.6.08 and Archibald Mogwe, 22.7.08

¹¹⁸ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/10, Refugee Organisations, Letter from Margaret Legum to Quett Masire, 19.10.66

¹¹⁹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 202, Report Southern Africa Department, 1.5.64

¹²⁰ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/560, 20, Osborne to Campbell, 14.7.65

¹²¹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 46/14, Letter from the District Commissioner of Kasane to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local government, 6.7.65

under Seretse Khama finally came to the conclusion that the request of the IRCOZ should be granted.¹²²

After independence the co-operation between the government and the refugee organisations intensified. The authorities did not bar the way of their partners as had been done before, after all they relied on them in many ways. In this way the welfare organisations could become an essential part of Botswana's refugee policy, although Matlou alleges that they also had their own agenda.¹²³

The assistance of the various organisations and agencies

The Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana relied on the support of a large number of non-governmental and transnational organisations for assistance with the refugees. During the colonial era these were united in the Joint Committee for Relief Work in the High Commission Territories, which had its seat in London. After independence the Botswana Christian Council (BCC) increasingly assumed the responsibilities of the Joint Committee. In a concerted effort to co-ordinate the assistance to the refugees in 1973, the BCC and the government of Botswana launched the Botswana Council for Refugees (BCR), which received funds (mainly) from the BCC, the UNHCR and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).¹²⁴

The various organisations continued to work independently under the Joint Committee, but with little co-operation among one another. The protectorate government therefore had to deal with them individually and received varying impressions of them at different times. While the International Refugee Council of Zambia (which mainly transported refugees from Francistown to Zambia)¹²⁵ was regarded as having an objective attitude, Amnesty International (AI) was looked upon with great suspicion by the British. This was due to the fact that AI's long-term representative, Cunningham, did not get on well with the British administration as protectorate officials felt that he was too politically engaged. When Sam Nujoma, Jacob Kuhangua and Emil Appolus visited Bechuanaland on a SWAPO mission in March 1964, Cunningham brought Kuhangua and Appolus from Southern Rhodesia to Francistown by car. When the British discovered the presence of the three SWAPO members, they wanted to expel them. Cunningham campaigned for them to remain in the territory thereby exerting a certain influence on SWAPO's activities. He contacted the High Commissioner claiming to need their help with the transit of the refugees. He threatened that he would contact his principles in London

¹²² Cf. *Ibid.*, Cabinet Memorandum, 12.1.66

¹²³ Cf. Matlou 1992: pp. 104 ff.

¹²⁴ Cf. Dale 1995: p. 38 f.

¹²⁵ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 46/14, Letter from Peter Mackay to J A Allison, 24.11.65

and create maximum publicity if his demands were not obeyed.¹²⁶ In the end all three were declared prohibited immigrants.¹²⁷ Yet, this is a prime example of the impact non-governmental organisations could exert in conflict situations, as has been pointed out by Hakovirta.¹²⁸ Other Amnesty staff were looked at in a more positive light. Considering her contribution towards the assistance with the refugees, Philipp Steenkamp referred to Margaret Roberts of AI as an “angel”¹²⁹ – a clear indication of how valuable the help of non-governmental and welfare organisations was.

When the BCC came into being, it would hand out cash allowances to the refugees and, on occasion, would provide them with loans if a lengthy stay were inevitable. It was also engaged in the running and maintenance of the White House.¹³⁰ The BCR, however, introduced strict criteria to decide which refugees would benefit from its assistance. The BCR regarded its assistance as a short-term measure aimed only at those who had applied for refugee status, were still awaiting a decision and who had no other means of support.¹³¹

Although conditions for the refugees were rarely satisfactory,¹³² money was made available by various non-governmental organisations as well as by the UNHCR. In 1976 the acting representative of the UNHCR in Gaborone pointed out that there was money for assistance to Namibian refugees in Africa, “with special priority to programmes for Namibian refugees in Botswana.” This fund could not be used for other purposes.¹³³ With the intensification of the war in Rhodesia and the increasing influx of refugees from Botswana’s eastern neighbour, additional financial help was badly needed. Supported by the UNHCR and the LWF, the government built a new refugee camp in Dukwe, north of Francistown.¹³⁴ This was to become home to SWANU refugees in Botswana. Their activities will be looked at in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The fourth chapter illustrated how the government of Botswana was subject to certain constraints in the handling of the liberation struggle. It has, however, become apparent that the amount of support the Namibian liberation movements, and SWAPO in partic-

¹²⁶ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 109, His Majesty’s Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22.3.64

¹²⁷ Cf. Ibid.

¹²⁸ Cf. Hakovirta 1986: p. 101

¹²⁹ Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

¹³⁰ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/57 and Dale 1995: p. 39

¹³¹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/55, Policy of assistance towards refugees

¹³² Cf. Matlou 1992: pp. 261 ff.

¹³³ Botswana National Archives, OP 27/56, Letter from Hans Veenbas to Mpotokwane, 7.9.76

¹³⁴ Cf. Dale 1995: p. 39

ular, received in Botswana was not negligible. The existing networks with the Ovaherero in Botswana and the feeling of togetherness provided an ideal platform for the prospective Namibian freedom fighters to continue on their way into exile. The debates surrounding succession among the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu emphasised the importance of incidents across the Namibian–Botswana border. All in all, the presence of large Herero communities in Botswana proved a blessing for the Namibian liberation movements. With the exception of some whites who supported apartheid South Africa, a general sympathy with the cause of the Namibian freedom fighters in Botswana existed, which resulted in favourable treatment and practical assistance for the refugees in most instances.

The assistance Namibian freedom fighters and refugees received from the Ovaherero and other individual Batswana was complemented by the financial and material input from various welfare organisations and by moral and ideological support from the political parties, mainly those from the opposition all opting, primarily, to back SWAPO. Their support was, however, limited because of the constraints they faced as an opposition party (as suggested by Olukoshi).¹³⁵ It was the BPP, in particular, with its experience derived from international solidarity conferences on the continent that created awareness about the struggle in the pan-African context among prospective Namibian freedom fighters.

In the following chapters we look at how SWAPO (7), but also SWANU (6) and NUDO (8), took advantage of the prevailing structures and how they consequently managed to become active on the territory of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana respectively.

¹³⁵ Cf. Olukoshi 1998: pp. 29–32

6 SWANU

In all southern African territories under colonial yoke, or under white minority regime, more than one liberation movement was founded. It is therefore necessary to deal with the various movements individually. As we have already established, Namibia was no exception to the phenomenon of disunity. Yet the lines were drawn quickly. As SWAPO's guerrilla war intensified and its international diplomatic negotiations proceeded, SWANU became increasingly sidelined. Nevertheless, this did not necessarily affect the activism of its members. There are two reasons why SWANU deserves a particular mention. Firstly, it was the oldest Namibian liberation movement and played an important role in the initial stages of the liberation struggle and the related nationalist awakening. Secondly, SWANU made extensive use of the territory of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana in the period after 1975 (even more so than SWAPO), which will be touched on in this chapter.

We have come to recognise that, in some African countries, SWANU's options were limited due to this lack of recognition. This chapter will illustrate how these limitations affected SWANU's activities, whilst highlighting Botswana's role. Botswana remained neutral with regard to the differences between the Namibian liberation movements and, by so doing, created the conditions that not only alleviated the situation of SWANU members in Botswana, it provided them with substantial room for manoeuvre. I will argue, that, although neither the Bechuanaland Protectorate nor Botswana was a site of military activity for liberation movements, SWANU still benefited greatly from making use of the territory in terms of logistics and communication. This chapter will show that, particularly in colonial times, SWANU's freedom of action was considerable. Despite the more or less official rejection of the armed struggle, plans for taking up arms were not only discussed within the SWANU leadership, but were pursued as an objective. Even though SWANU's military plans did, as we know, never materialise, Botswana is still associated with them to a substantial degree.

Once SWAPO refugees had gained access to Angola, Botswana gradually lost importance as a transit country for Namibian freedom fighters leaving for exile. There is no doubt that Botswana's importance declined tremendously with the Portuguese departure from Angola, which is why the period before the Portuguese Revolution is the main focus of this research. Nonetheless, the examination of the time following the change of government in Angola enhances our understanding of SWANU's position. I will therefore argue that the conception exiled SWANU members held of the liberation struggle became

increasingly detached from their actual situation. This ultimately resulted in the failure of what will be termed the “second wave” group of SWANU.

SWANU's structures on the way to exile

Motives for leaving Namibia

The first SWANU person who left South West Africa was Jariretundu Kozonguizi. He departed in 1959 even before SWANU was officially formed and before he was elected president *in absentia*. By the time he left, there was no great awareness of refugees from other southern African territories in Bechuanaland, and Kozonguizi was able to cross the British protectorate easily. He had been sent by the Herero Chief's Council to join Michael Scott and Mburumba Kerina in petitioning the United Nations in New York.¹ The first actual SWANU members who escaped through Bechuanaland left in 1960 primarily intending to seek further education abroad.² The issue of military training was not openly talked about and, in the case of SWANU, it was not always the main reason for leaving the country. The first group of SWANU leaders who left the country therefore ended up as students in exile.³

Some of the SWANU leaders benefited, as SWAPO members had done, from the United Nations Scholarships which were introduced by a UN Resolution adopted on 19 December 1961. This resolution allowed for the provision of a special fund for Namibians that would give them the opportunity for study in a foreign country to compensate for the lack of educational opportunities under the apartheid system. With this fund, which consisted of \$50,000 each year from 1962 to 1964, the UN acknowledged its special responsibility towards Namibia.⁴ One of the first SWANU leaders, who took advantage of this scholarship programme, was Festus Muundjua, SWANU secretary for education between 1960 and 1962, who left South West Africa via Bechuanaland at the end of 1962.⁵

Other leading figures of SWANU studied in Sweden, while the movement of “ordinary” SWANU members into exile in the 1960s remained marginal. The Afro-American Institute, which was fully backed by the US government,⁶ had set up two institutes for refugees from southern African territories in 1966. One was in Tanzania, the other in

¹ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 299

² Cf. Interviews with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08 and Charles Kauraisa, 18.9.08

³ Cf. Sellström 1999: p. 261 f.

⁴ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 54, UN Resolution, 19.12.61

⁵ Cf. Interview with Festus Muundjua, 22.8.08

⁶ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 56/10: Botswana High Commissioner in Lusaka, 30.1.67

Zambia. They aimed to provide secondary education for those still under colonial rule. From the Namibian side, it was mainly SWAPO that had people in the Afro-American Institute, primarily in Zambia at Nkumbi International College in Kabwe.⁷ Kozonguizi suggested that SWAPO's affinity to Nkumbi could be linked to the alleged co-operation of SWAPO with the American Metal Climax Corporation which, according to his view, had come about because SWAPO (rather than SWANU) was seen as being "pro-west in outlook".⁸ Indeed, Botswana had come to the conclusion that the Afro-American Institute had been founded to make sure that those southern African refugees would not fall into the hands of communist countries that were offering education.⁹ In 1976 when the United Nations Institute for Namibia was opened in Lusaka, admission was arranged at a ratio of 80:20. This meant that 80 percent of the students had to be from SWAPO, whereas the remaining 20 percent of the places were to be taken by SWANU members. For the purpose of selecting Namibian refugees in Botswana for the UN Institute, teachers



Fig. 20: Leading SWANU representatives in Stockholm in April 1965. From left to right: Ambrose Kandjii (with a child), Bertha Ngavirue, Zedekia Ngavirue, Pumootu Kandjii, Nathaniel Mbaeva, Katjimunina Vei and Moses Katjiuongua

⁷ Cf. Interview with Festus Tjikua, 25.9.08

⁸ Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, No. 25 (Nov. 1964)

⁹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 56/10, High Commissioner Botswana in Lusaka, 30.1.67



Fig. 21: Buitepos, the borderpost between Namibia and Botswana, in 1965

from the Institute such as SWAPO's Mose Tjitendero came to Botswana to interview prospective students.¹⁰ As we will come to see later, this made life difficult for the increasing number of SWANU refugees who had entered Botswana since the mid seventies. There were a few SWANU members who were forced to leave Namibia, because of their political activities, but the majority was simply looking for better education. Not unjustly, Zed Ngavirue, one of the members of SWANU's External Council at the time,

concluded that there was a "certain degree of opportunism"¹¹ among the refugees. In other words, political motives were not always at the forefront when Namibians decided to go into exile.

Others, however, had made plans to work in Botswana,¹² and then there were those who were aspiring to go for military training. There must have been some misconceptions about SWANU's capabilities among the SWANU members who left the country from 1975 onwards. Before the Refugee Advisory Committee in Francistown, some refugees declared, for example, that SWANU had military training camps in Sweden.¹³ Evidently, they had come to know that many of the members of the SWANU External Council were staying in Sweden, but there did not seem to be any knowledge of the military inactivity of SWANU. It becomes apparent that with the intensification of SWAPO's guerrilla war, the intention to fight for independence militarily increased among SWANU members preparing themselves to leave the country.¹⁴ When they arrived in Botswana, they came to

¹⁰ Cf. Interview with Festus Tjikua, 25.9.08

¹¹ Interview with Zed Ngavirue, 25.8.08

¹² Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/10 Refugee Advisory Committee Reports Francistown

¹³ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/9, Refugee Advisory Committee Francistown Reports

¹⁴ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Willem Karamatha, 23.9.08 and Kanhangua Albert Kavaria, 13.9.08

realise that SWANU was not involved in the armed struggle. At one stage, Zed Ngavirue made a visit to Botswana and his SWANU people greeted him by shouting “Ngavirue, give us guns!” in chorus.¹⁵ While SWANU leaders in the 1960s were mainly radical in thinking, this example points to the fact that by the mid-seventies its members wanted to become more militant. However, the only option open to SWANU members at that stage was to seek further education, although (see the fourth subsection of this chapter, p. 142 ff.) attempts were made in Botswana to establish contacts with potential donor countries in order to revive the military plans of SWANU.

The route into exile

As most SWANU members came from the central part of Namibia, the route they took on their way into exile was clear. They crossed a few kilometres north or south of the border post known as Buitepos, which was the crossing point on the road between Gobabis and Ghanzi. From there they moved to Ghanzi, from where they headed northwards for Sehitwa and Maun. It is striking, that in many instances, Namibian refugees did not report to the police as soon as they had crossed the border. Quite a few only reported in Maun because in Ngamiland they were in an area that was less hostile, whereas they did not feel at ease in the Ghanzi district, where many Boers had their farms. The ultimate destination in Botswana was Francistown. In the early years their onward departure was organised via Southern Rhodesia or, alternatively, via Kasane and Kazungula, to Zambia. This way, because they avoided the towns along the relatively densely populated railway line from Mafikeng to Bulawayo, the refugees did not, with the exception of Francistown, come into contact with too many people in Botswana. On their way to Francistown they were able to take advantage of the structures, the Herero networks in particular, outlined in chapter 5. Daniel Munamava’s place in Sehitwa was a common location for the refugees to remain before further transport in form of a truck or other vehicles was available.

As previously mentioned, the number of SWANU members leaving the country increased from 1975 onwards. There were very few refugee movements from Namibia in 1966/7 and 1974/5. It is clear that due to the new situation in Angola, many Namibians, especially Oshivambo speaking SWAPO members, managed to leave the country from 1974 onwards without having to cross Botswana. The reason for the drop in refugee traffic between Botswana and Namibia during this period can only be attributed to a tighter security situation both in Namibia and in Botswana. The South African authorities had, by the time of Botswana’s independence, become aware of the refugee pipeline that had developed between the two countries. Furthermore, the armed struggle was launched in

¹⁵ Interview with Zed Ngavirue, 25.8.08

1966, forcing the South Africans to undertake further preventive measures.¹⁶ It is likely that many Namibians intending to leave the country were detected by the police, or other security forces, while still in Namibia. Secondly, with the arrival of independence Botswana had introduced a more systematic (see chapter 4) approach towards the refugees. Isolated occurrences, such as the incursion of some ZAPU and ANC fighters in north-eastern Botswana, which led to the arrest of some of the freedom fighters, must have contributed to the temporary hesitance of many potential exiles.

Mesag Moruko, who left for exile as a SWANU member in 1975, attributes the interruption of SWANU movements into Botswana to the non-recognition by the OAU, whereas SWAPO did not want to send Ovambos via Herero areas into Botswana on their own. Moruko reckons that:

[...] the recognition stopped a lot of things. [...] Only SWAPO people could go further. It was also the time of Ongulumbashe¹⁷, so a lot of people were arrested. There was no chance to get out. [...] So there was no more continuation. Those people who were recognised, for them it was not easy to get through Botswana because they were Ovambos. Everything was linked to tribe. If you went there the first villages were occupied by Hereros. It was not easy for them if you could not go together with other Hereros.¹⁸

This seems to contradict what had been established earlier on, that is that the Ovaherero in Botswana assisted the refugees irrespective of their ethnic affiliation. Moruko indeed asserts

that they could have helped. But it is not easy to just run like that if you don't know anybody.¹⁹

It is understandable that many SWAPO would-be freedom fighters, largely uneducated and with little knowledge of Namibia, let alone neighbouring territories, would have preferred to be in the company of Namibian Ovaherero who could have helped them with issues like language and culture in the Herero areas in Botswana. A closer look at SWAPO refugees will, however, follow in the next chapter.

It was almost impossible²⁰ initially to leave in big groups through Botswana.²¹ From 1975 onwards, SWANU sent larger groups of twenty, or even thirty, people through Botswana at a time. Before then, neither SWANU nor SWAPO members had left in groups of more than five or six people thereby reducing their chances of detection on the way to Botswana.

¹⁶ Cf. Interview with Mesag Moruko, 3.10.08

¹⁷ The beginning of the armed resistance on 26 August 1966

¹⁸ Interview with Mesag Moruko, 3.10.08

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ It will be shown in chapter 8 that it actually was possible on one occasion.

²¹ Cf. Interview with Nickey Iyambo, 7.10.08

The organisation of SWANU in Botswana

Daniel Munamava as a representative

Daniel Munamava was not only the most valuable person to organise the refugee traffic in Ngamiland, he was also a vital link for SWANU's political activities in Ngamiland and western Botswana. Although he never differentiated between the Namibian liberation movements, he had been a member of SWANU (being more involved with the leading structure of SWANU), almost since its inception. As the significance of SWANU diminished, Munamava became more affiliated to SWAPO, although in the 1960s he did act as the SWANU representative in Sehitwa. Claudius Kandjou claimed that at that stage, the entire settlement of Sehitwa was a SWANU domain.²² This assessment seems logical, for SWANU was the oldest liberation movement and therefore the first to put down roots in Bechuanaland. Additionally, one has to remember that Sehitwa was a settlement mainly inhabited by Ovambanderu, who were well represented in the SWANU leadership. During the initial stage of the Namibian liberation movement before the launching of the armed struggle, awareness of the events surrounding the struggle to liberate Namibia among the Ovaherero and the Ovambanderu in Ngamiland was not that pronounced, so that they were not able to distinguish between SWANU and SWAPO.



Fig. 22: After the opening of the SWANU office in Dar es Salaam, 1961. From left to right: Zedekia Ngavirue; Jariretundu Kozonguizi; Daniel Munamava; Nathan Mbaeva

²² Cf. Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08

The decision to make Daniel Munamava the official SWANU representative in Sehitwa was taken during discussions held 4 August to 16 August 1962 in Tanganyika between Jariretundu Kozonguizi, Zed Ngavirue, Nathaniel Mbaeva and Munamava. It was agreed that Daniel Munamava should open a SWANU office in Sehitwa. He was equipped with SWANU membership cards, a SWANU stamp and SWANU letterheads. Further branches were then to be established in Makakung, Mahalapye, Maun, Rakops and the Vryburg District.²³ These places all had Herero populations. Although Vryburg was not part of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, it proved to be beyond SWANU's capabilities to make itself more visible in these areas. Although Daniel Munamava was assisted by a kind of executive committee,²⁴ even the representation in Sehitwa never became an official office. Munamava was simply operating from his house and thereby certainly attracted less attention. Nonetheless, Kozonguizi claimed in 1965 that SWANU had already 600 members in Bechuanaland.²⁵ Although Uatumua Nguvauva, a relative of the late Chief Munjuku II, confirmed that many people in the Sehitwa area were in possession of a SWANU membership card,²⁶ this did, however, not mean that they were actively involved in the liberation movement. Some of them might have even held membership cards of SWAPO and SWANU without ever actively engaging themselves in either of the organisations. Similarly, the current President of the RDP, Hidipo Hamutenya, recently claimed that his party has 250,000 members²⁷ – an enormous number. It might be correct that 250,000 membership cards were distributed, but this does not say anything about the number of actual followers, not to mention active party members.

The active group was confined to a close circle around Daniel Munamava. One of his responsibilities was to raise funds for the party in Ngamiland. The British had observed a "chronic shortage of funds"²⁸ in SWANU to organise the party in Ngamiland. It was Kozonguizi's idea to collect money among the members in Ngamiland. In 1964 he expected to raise £300 per year just in the District of Sehitwa, provided that "officials worked hard, sincerely and honestly."²⁹ A year later, Kozonguizi's proposals became more concrete. In a meeting in Tanzania in August 1965 with members of the External

²³ Cf. Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, No. 7

²⁴ Cf. Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08 and Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, No. 7

²⁵ Cf. Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, No. 22

²⁶ Cf. Interview with Uatumua Nguvauva, 27.7.08

²⁷ Cf. *The Namibian*, 27.4.09

²⁸ British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 1, High Commissioner to Secretary of States for the Colonies, 9.6.64

²⁹ *Ibid.*, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

Council, the Executive Committee and Daniel Munamava, as the Bechuanaland representative, he demanded the appointment of a party treasurer to collect £3 per month from each member. This way, he argued, the Bechuanaland Party Branch would be self-reliant and completely financially independent after six months.³⁰

With the failure of SWANU's military plans (see p. 142 ff.), the party's plans in Botswana never materialised. Daniel Munamava continued to provide Namibian refugees with transport and accommodation, but this was linked more to his general endeavours in the Namibian liberation struggle than to his position as a SWANU representative. As will be shown in the second subsection of this chapter, SWANU still managed to hold events of some significance in Bechuanaland in the early years of the liberation struggle. These events were linked to the Namibian liberation struggle and never concerned Bechuanaland or Botswana. Interestingly, Kozonguizi had made it clear in the meeting in Tanganyika in 1962 that SWANU activists in Bechuanaland should, under no circumstances, get involved in domestic politics.³¹ One of the major principles for refugees that had been set out by the British was thereby adhered to by command from the top party leadership.

SWANU's "agents" in Botswana

During Botswana's pre-independence period, SWANU refugees passing through the territory not only depended on the Mbanderu structures in the area around Sehitwa, but relied on the work of leading party members who facilitated the smooth transit of refugees via Bechuanaland. SWANU's main agents during that time were Ambrosius Kandji and Werner Mamugwe.³²

Ambrosius Kandji had left South West Africa in August 1960. Having studied economics and history in Ghana, he had become the SWANU representative in Cairo. At the same time, he frequently entered Bechuanaland to organise the transport of refugees through the British territory. In 1962 Kandji visited the Herero communities in Maun, Mahalapye and Sehitwa, where he tried to make arrangements for people passing through from South West Africa.³³ His activities were not only confined to helping SWANU members. He assisted SWAPO refugees to cross Bechuanaland, e.g. Nickey Iyambo in 1964.³⁴ By that time he knew the territory well and, as we will come to see in the following subsection, he took advantage of his knowledge of Bechuanaland by making the

³⁰ Cf. Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, No. 22

³¹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

³² Cf. Interview with Charles Kauraisa, 18.9.08

³³ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

³⁴ Cf. Interviews with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08 and Nickey Iyambo, 7.10.08

protectorate an occasional meeting place for encounters with the executive of the internal faction of SWANU. He regarded himself as a SWANU “field worker”.³⁵ He spent so much time in Bechuanaland in the 1960s that even the British authorities thought that he was an actual resident of Sehitwa.³⁶

Kandji’s route, on which he took the refugees, ran via Maun and Francistown and then on to Southern Rhodesia. When the escape through Southern Rhodesia became more difficult, he altered the route and sent the refugees via Kazungula. It was his task to pick up people from South West Africa who had fled to Bechuanaland, but had no political affiliation, and to recruit them for SWANU’s purposes. In an interview Kandji elaborates:

My mission was to get hold of all the people who were interested in military training and who were interested in schooling also.³⁷

Werner Mamugwe’s visits to Bechuanaland were equally frequent. As secretary for mobilisation, he was a member of the executive of SWANU inside South West Africa. He was described as a “vital link between SWANU on the home front and the SWANU External Council in Botswana”.³⁸ Between 1960 and 1965, when he left for exile in Israel, he went on several SWANU missions from Windhoek to Francistown in order to arrange the refugee traffic.³⁹ On these occasions, he had made friends with the Chief of Kule, who then provided shelter to many refugees on their way into exile. Due to his regular visits to Bechuanaland, Werner Mamugwe was one of the very few Namibian freedom fighters who was fluent in Setswana.⁴⁰

Having obtained a scholarship from the Afro-Asian Institute, he went to Israel for studies in 1965 where he later received military training.⁴¹ He was not allowed back into Botswana, having been declared a prohibited immigrant in August 1965,⁴² therefore he moved to Dar es Salaam. Having been given a seven-seater Land Rover by the Israelis, he took this to Botswana, where Daniel Munamava and his team made use of it for the transport of refugees.⁴³

³⁵ Interview with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

³⁶ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 137, His Majesty’s Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3.4.64

³⁷ Interview with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

³⁸ //Gowaseb 2007: p. 89

³⁹ Cf. Ibid.: p. 89

⁴⁰ Cf. Interviews with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08 and Charles Kauraisa, 18.9.08

⁴¹ Cf. //Gowaseb 2007: p. 90

⁴² Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to Senior Permanent Secretary, Office of the President, 19.6.67

⁴³ Cf. //Gowaseb 2007: p. 90

SWANU activities in Botswana

Propaganda in Ngamiland

As mentioned previously, it was official SWANU policy to abstain from any domestic politics in Botswana. However, it was clear that the British demand not to engage in politics practically included any political involvement. Any political agitation engineered by the liberation movements on their territory would have made it more attractive to prospective freedom fighters to flee via Bechuanaland, or even stay there. This is why, whenever SWANU was trying to campaign for its objectives, or simply wanted to make use of Bechuanaland or Botswana respectively for logistical co-ordination, the party was acting in a kind of legal borderland. SWANU consequently only managed to hold a few public gatherings in Ngamiland, whereas most of the efforts to sensitise the people to the Namibian liberation struggle had to rather be undertaken in secret and was, therefore, less effective.

These public gatherings, which also caught the attention of the British authorities, took place in the beginning of 1964 in the areas of Sehitwa and Makakung. Before that, Daniel Munamava and his executive had, of course, recruited members for SWANU in Ngamiland and, if one may give credence to Kozonguizi's figures, they were quite successful in doing so. But, as explained earlier on, this did not mean that those people who possessed SWANU membership cards were well informed about the struggle for liberation in Namibia. On one occasion, Festus Muundjua had given a few lectures to the Ovambanderu in Sehitwa while on his way into exile in 1962, but this fell far short of any awareness campaign.⁴⁴

In 1964 the SWANU leadership in exile took the view that the time was ripe to further educate the Herero communities in Ngamiland about the Namibian liberation struggle. Evidently, the external wing of SWANU was not satisfied enough with the work of Daniel Munamava and his group,⁴⁵ despite the fact that they were the major facilitators of all the refugee traffic from South West Africa in the area. Thus, Jariretundu Kozonguizi returned to Bechuanaland with Ambrosius Kandji on 13 January 1964 to address this issue. Having helped some of the remaining SWANU refugees to leave Bechuanaland, the two SWANU leaders held two big meetings in Ngamiland, on 27 January in Sehitwa and 3 February in Ondanga in the area of Makakung. The British observed that these meetings were "well attended and lively."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Cf. Interview with Festus Muundjua, 22.8.08

⁴⁵ Cf. Interview with Charles Kauraisa, 18.9.08

⁴⁶ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

Kozonguizi had been authorised by the SWANU leaders in Sweden to talk to the Herero communities in Ngamiland about the Namibian struggle in order to make them aware of what SWANU's endeavours were about.⁴⁷ He wanted to convince the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu of Ngamiland that they were part of the struggle and that their support was very much needed and appreciated.⁴⁸ According to British observers, Makakung was an area that was traditionally "anti-SWANU".⁴⁹ As we have come to know, Makakung was mainly inhabited by Herero-Hereros. They stood firmly behind Hosea Kutako, with whom SWANU did not enjoy good relations after Clemence Kapuuo's statement before the Hall Commission of Enquiry, following the shootings in the Old Location⁵⁰ and Kozonguizi's speech in Beijing in 1960. Indeed, Ambrosius Kandji recalls that due to the split between SWANU and the Chief's Council, SWANU's political agitation was regarded as controversial. He remembers that:

[...] there were two sides. Some were supporting the Kapuuos, the Chief's Council which became NUDO later, and some were supporting SWANU [...].⁵¹

However, the British estimated that notwithstanding these initial problems, both meetings in Ngamiland could be regarded as a success, although they did not have a direct effect in the sense that SWANU activism increased in the area.⁵² They mainly contributed to the overall awareness among the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu in Ngamiland as to what was happening across the western border and in exile.

One might wonder why the British tolerated this evident violation of the "no politics" clause. Looking at the general behaviour of the British administration in the Bechuanaland Protectorate over the years, it becomes apparent that colonial officials tried to avoid trouble at all costs. It would not have been possible to break up the meeting without the use of force, which would not have been appropriate and required a lot of manpower, which was simply not available. It was far easier to observe what was being talked about and to later declare the leading figures, namely Kozonguizi and Kandji, prohibited immigrants. This was done after a decision of the Executive Council at the British High Commissioner's suggestion in July of the same year⁵³

⁴⁷ Cf. Interview with Festus Muundjua, 22.8.08

⁴⁸ Cf. Interview with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

⁴⁹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

⁵⁰ Cf. Chapter 2: An outline of historical developments in South West Africa, p. 34 f.

⁵¹ Interview with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

⁵² Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

⁵³ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 4, CO 1048/343, His Majesty's Commissioner to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11.7.64

and could partly be seen as a consequence of the SWANU leaders' propaganda activities in Ngamiland. The High Commissioner felt that Kozonguizi and Kandji were dangerous to the protectorate because:

[...] they provide[d] incentives to illegal immigration from South West Africa [and] cause[d] disturbance to local politics by alien influence of external SWAPO/SWANU disagreements [...], they involve[d] Bechuanaland Protectorate locals in their disputes; will probably increase Damara [i.e. Herero] intransigence in Ngamiland [and] will endanger the relationship of the Bechuanaland Protectorate with South Africa.⁵⁴

Evidently, the British were well aware of Pretoria's dislike of activities of the liberation movements on its territory. The most basic course of action to prevent the SWANU leaders from organising any further party activities in Ngamiland, or in other areas of Botswana, was therefore not to allow them to return to the protectorate.

With the increasing marginalisation of SWANU that began with the unidirectional orientation of the OAU towards SWAPO shortly after the big meetings in Makukung and Sehitwa, SWANU became less efficient in campaigning in Botswana. From then on, SWANU leaders made use of Botswana's territory for either facilitating refugee traffic or for meeting representatives from the internal wing of SWANU.

Botswana: A meeting place for External Council and National Executive *Consultation with the National Executive in 1964*

Consultation with the leadership of the internal wing was both essential and difficult for SWANU leaders in exile. Although Ambrosius Kandji once made a clandestine visit to South West Africa on one of his trips to Bechuanaland in 1962,⁵⁵ a visit to their home country was out of question for most of the SWANU leaders in exile. They would have directly attracted the attention of the South African authorities and would have faced immediate arrest. It became a viable option for representatives of the External Council (or before its official formation simply SWANU leaders in exile), and of the National Executive to meet on the territory of Bechuanaland or Botswana respectively. In his study on the ANC in exile, Hans-Georg Schleicher mentions that both Botswana and Swaziland were regarded as so-called "forward areas", where ANC members could meet their relatives from South Africa. This was common practice until the ANC banned it in 1980 for security reasons.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid.

⁵⁵ British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

⁵⁶ Schleicher 2004: p. 50

Even much earlier, it had not been all that easy for SWANU representatives abroad to re-enter Botswana after going into exile, because they had usually been declared prohibited immigrants after their departure. When Kozonguizi escaped through Bechuanaland in 1959, this practice was not yet in place and he managed to return to Bechuanaland in January 1964 without great difficulty. Kozonguizi and Kandji not only came to Bechuanaland to hold meetings in Ngamiland, but also to discuss issues of the liberation struggle with members of SWANU's National Executive from South West Africa. Werner Mamugwe had been Kozonguizi's contact person in the National Executive as he was familiar with the set-up in Botswana.⁵⁷ He led the mission of five members of SWANU's National Executive to Bechuanaland in February 1964. Alongside Mamugwe, the national chairman at the time, the representatives of the internal SWANU, who met Kozonguizi and Kandji for five days in February 1964 in Francistown, were Siegfried Tjorokisa (secretary), David Kasume (treasurer), Jeremia Jagger (secretary for economics and labour) and Andries Booys (secretary for education and culture).⁵⁸

One of the main issues discussed was the question of armed struggle. With SWAPO already training its first cadres and with the ALC exerting pressure on SWANU, this was an urgent matter that needed to be addressed. There was a general consensus that it was necessary to take up arms.⁵⁹ Later in this chapter we will come to see how this affected SWANU's course of action. Another topic on the agenda was the relationship between SWANU's external and internal wings. The National Executive Committee of SWANU was found to be the weakest part of the organisation. Agreement was reached to hold a national conference within the following three weeks to elect a strong committee, capable of confronting the recommendations of the South African Odendaal Commission, which provided for the establishment of ethnic homelands for Namibia's various population groups.⁶⁰

This national conference was held in Windhoek from 31 May to 1 June. Kozonguizi observed that it led to a period of non-co-operation between the internal leadership, the president and the external representatives. This is why Kozonguizi called for the August meeting⁶¹ in Tanzania in 1965.⁶² As Kozonguizi had already been declared a prohibited immigrant in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, he was no longer able to conduct meetings of this kind in the British territory.

⁵⁷ Cf. Interview with Andries Booys, 10.8.08

⁵⁸ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

⁵⁹ Cf. Interview with Andries Booys, 10.8.08

⁶⁰ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

⁶¹ See p. 128 f.

⁶² Cf. Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, No. 22

In the 1964 meeting in Francistown, the National Executive briefed Kozonguizi and Kandji on the progress of unification between SWANU, SWAPO and other organisations inside Namibia. At that stage, there was still hope among the internal leaders of SWANU that there could be a common front of all the liberation movements,⁶³ whereas the external SWANU had already become disillusioned in this respect. Before the meeting ended, they decided to send two of the internal SWANU leaders, Booys and Tjorokisa for further studies. The others were to return to South West Africa to investigate conditions in South West Africa, especially the plans of the Odendaal Commission, in time for the South West Africa hearing before the International Court of Justice.⁶⁴

Once again, it is striking how well informed the British authorities were about the meeting in Francistown. They even noted the travel expenses of the people involved and had an overview of SWANU's funds.⁶⁵ Yet, they did not feel it necessary to interrupt the gathering, which would have been easier than during the meetings in Ngamiland, as it would only have involved a few people. British behaviour in this regard can be seen as what Quett Masire later termed "turning a blind eye"⁶⁶ to various activities. Moses Kandovazu had pointed to the fact that the protectorate officials thoroughly observed what was happening behind the scenes in order not to disconcert South Africa,⁶⁷ but as long as nothing reached Pretoria about the potentially "hot" content of the activities, the British did not do more than necessary. In this way the British knew exactly what SWANU's plans were. If they had interrupted the meeting, SWANU's intentions would have remained closed to them.

A mission in 1966

After the launching of SWAPO's armed struggle in August 1966, SWANU started to reconsider its options in the liberation struggle. As we will come to see in section 6.4 (p. 142 ff.), an armed resistance was being discussed and prepared. At the same time, the issue of the Makunda refugees that will be looked at in chapter 8 caught the attention of all Namibian liberation movements. It was thus the intention of members of the SWANU External Council, who entered Botswana in December 1966, to find out more about the Ovaherero in Makunda, as well as to try to keep in touch with the home front in South West Africa, in order to organise further military training.

⁶³ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

⁶⁴ Cf. Interview with Andries Booys, 10.8.08 and Botswana National Archives, OP 55/60, Officer commanding no. 5 district, Maun to Commissioner of Police, 15.6.65

⁶⁵ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/650, 9, Note No. 2 for the Agenda of the 144th Meeting of the Executive Council to be held on 2.7.64

⁶⁶ Cf. Interview with Quett Masire, 27.6.08

⁶⁷ Cf. Interview with Moses Kandovazu, 25.7.08

The mission started when Zed Ngavirue received a telegram in Sweden from three SWANU refugees who had been stopped by the police in Mamuno in October 1966.⁶⁸ As information from and consultation with the home front was urgently needed, Ngavirue went to Botswana in order to meet the three who were held in custody in Mamuno while the immigration procedures were pending.⁶⁹ Moses Katjiuongua, Uatja Kaukuetu and Ambrosius Kandji consequently also came to Botswana. Katjiuongua, Kaukuetu and Kandji arrived in Maun by air from Zambia on 7 December 1966. While Ngavirue, having arrived from Sweden, was not detected, the other three were detained in Maun under the terms of the Immigration Law. They were ordered to report to the police in Maun daily before their return to Zambia.⁷⁰ This meant that there was no chance for them to reach places such as Makunda or Mamuno. The three SWANU leaders might have had their conditions relaxed had Ambrosius Kandji not escaped one night. He wanted to meet some of the refugees in Sehitwa, which he had been unable to do during the day. He was, however, detected by the Botswana Police and following that all three were restricted to Maun.⁷¹ In Botswana it was felt that the three fresh arrivals from Zambia might be a potential source of trouble. The Commissioner of Police believed that the

[...] presence of these leading personalities is disturbing and creates much work for the police in Ngamiland and the Chobe Districts. It is difficult at local level to ascertain whether these visits are genuinely and solely concerned with scholarship arrangements for refugees.⁷²

By the end of 1966, it was no longer that easy to claim to be helping refugees in order to gain permission to remain in the territory. Besides, in this particular case, Botswana had just become independent. As has been noted, there was a lot of insecurity in the first months after independence with regard to the handling of concrete cases of freedom fighters attempting to use Botswana for their activities.

As a result, only Zed Ngavirue managed to get to Mamuno. He did not get involved in the Makunda issue, and attempted only to meet those three SWANU refugees in order to establish contact with the home front. However, when he arrived at Mamuno, two of

⁶⁸ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Office of the Officer Commanding, Botswana Police to Commissioner of Police, 31.10.66

⁶⁹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Office of the Officer Commanding, Botswana Police to Commissioner of Police, 31.10.66

⁷⁰ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/60, Commissioner of Police to Senior Permanent Secretary, Office of the President, 8.12.66

⁷¹ Cf. Interviews with Moses Katjiuongua, 4.8.08 and Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08 and Botswana National Archives, OP 55/60, Commissioner of Police to Senior Permanent Secretary, Office of the President, 12.12.66

⁷² Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/60, Commissioner of Police to Senior Permanent Secretary, Office of the President, 12.12.66

the three had already left the country after being involved in a fight. With one remaining person there could hardly be a proper debate about how SWANU refugees could be moved out of Namibia for military training. As Ngavirue was the only who got as far as Mamuno, no proper link could be established on this mission.⁷³

SWANU refugees: The second wave

A build-up of SWANU refugees

Once SWAPO refugees started to leave Namibia via Angola after the Revolution of the Carnations, it became impossible for the South African Police to patrol all the borders of Namibia. In consequence, SWANU members inspired by the refugee movements, which had started to gain momentum in the north of the country, prepared to leave Namibia – again via Botswana. Before these movements were revived, contacts were made by representatives of the internal wing of SWANU, who visited Botswana several times in order to deliberate on the transit with Daniel Munamava.⁷⁴ The first group of SWANU refugees in that period that could be considered part of the second wave of SWANU refugees left Namibia in June 1975.⁷⁵ This time they left in bigger groups, with sometimes up to 30 people in one group.⁷⁶ By October 1975, the Botswana authorities had already recorded 58 SWANU refugees.⁷⁷ In the following years, the number of SWANU refugees in Botswana increased continuously. Due to the high number of Zimbabwean refugees, this was not all that visible; by the beginning of the 1980s, there were about 200 SWANU refugees in Botswana. They were mainly located in Francistown and, from 1980 onwards, in the new refugee camp in Dukwe.⁷⁸

The simple reason for the presence of so many SWANU refugees in Botswana was the non-recognition of the movement by the OAU. While SWAPO could reasonably easily transport its people to the military training camps, or otherwise obtain scholarships for its members, SWANU was struggling to offer its members any opportunities for further study, let alone military training. It was not that SWANU did not have any contacts abroad through which scholarships could be arranged, often SWANU refugees did not manage to get any further than Botswana, as Zambia would not accept them. Although many SWANU refugees were left with the impression that the Botswana government

⁷³ Cf. Interview with Zed Ngavirue, 25.8.08

⁷⁴ Cf. Interview with Mike Kauami, 22.9.08

⁷⁵ Cf. Interview with Willem Karamatha, 23.9.08

⁷⁶ Cf. Interviews with Charlotte Kauaria, 24.9.08 and Mike Kauami, 22.9.08

⁷⁷ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/46, Botswana High Commissioner in Lusaka to Secretary for External Affairs, 9.10.75

⁷⁸ Cf. Interview with Rihupisa Kandando, 20.8.08

rejected them,⁷⁹ it has to be emphasized again, that the government of Botswana did not distinguish between SWAPO and SWANU. For the Zambian authorities, however, it made a crucial difference. SWAPO was the recognised Namibian liberation movement and, therefore, SWANU refugees were not given permission to travel through Zambia. Government authorities contacted Botswana's High Commission in Lusaka in order to find opportunities for the increasing number of SWANU refugees in Botswana to leave the country but, except for those SWANU students admitted to the UN Institute for Namibia and therefore able to leave, the situation did not improve.⁸⁰

These problems confined many SWANU refugees to Botswana for two or three years before eventually being granted scholarships for overseas study. With the help of Sean MacBride, the UN High Commissioner for Namibia, and the German Otto-Benecke-Foundation, many SWANU refugees in Botswana left for Ireland and Germany. Some furthered their academic studies, while others received a technical education.⁸¹

Representatives of the “second wave” group

As soon as the first groups of SWANU people arrived in Francistown, they set up a leadership structure.⁸² A committee of four members representing all SWANU members in and around Francistown was established. The first committee consisted of Joseph Hauanga as chairman, Ben Karamatha as vice-chairman, Willem Karamatha as secretary and John Tjirare as vice-secretary. The committee members presented themselves to the government of Botswana in January 1976 as official SWANU representatives.⁸³ Later Uatjindjua Ndjove became the main spokesperson for SWANU in Francistown and Dukwe.⁸⁴

The government of Botswana, however, took a tough stance on these representatives. The representative committee approached the authorities with many requests concerning the living conditions of the SWANU refugees, especially before the establishment of Dukwe, when prison accommodation was still being used to house the refugees. The attitude of the Botswana government was expressed clearly in a meeting of the Minister of State with SWANU refugees in Francistown on 25 January 1976. In the notes for the minister it read:

⁷⁹ Cf. Interview with Kanhangua Albert Hambira, 13.9.08

⁸⁰ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/56, Botswana High Commissioner in Lusaka to Secretary for External Affairs, 5.5.76

⁸¹ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Rihupisa Kandando, 20.8.08, Kanhangua Albert Hambira, 13.9.08 and Mesag Moruko, 3.10.08

⁸² Cf. Interview with Charlotte Kauaria, 24.9.08

⁸³ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/46, Notes on meeting with SWANU representatives, 5.1.76

⁸⁴ Cf. Interviews with Kanhangua Albert Hambira, 13.9.08, Moses Katjuongua, 4.8.08 and Mike Kauami, 22.9.08

They are kept in prison simply because we have no other accommodation for them. [...] they are not the first refugees to be treated this way. It must be explained to the SWANU men that Botswana is not a rich country, and that if they want us to grant them political asylum, they must be prepared to accept the assistance we offer them, which is all we can afford. Otherwise they should not come to this country.⁸⁵

This may sound very harsh and it almost appears as if Botswana did not adhere to her principle of treating all liberation movements in the same way. Similar problems did not arise with SWAPO. As the recognised liberation movement, its members had easier access to Zambia; indeed most SWAPO members did not leave Namibia via Botswana after the Portuguese had left Angola. Besides, as Matlou points out in his thesis, the situation in Botswana became tenser with the increasing numbers of Zimbabwean refugees.⁸⁶ Consequently, the SWANU representatives experienced great difficulty in getting their voices heard.

The protracted stay of the SWANU refugees

While waiting for scholarship arrangements, many SWANU students spent two or three, or even more years in Botswana. Up until 1980, they were mainly accommodated in Francistown, some also in Maun. The White House was the first choice, but once it was full, there was no other option than to accommodate the refugees in prison.⁸⁷ In 1980 repatriation of Zimbabwean refugees started, and the Botswana government decided to move all refugees to Dukwe.⁸⁸ As has been pointed out, the refugees were supported by various welfare and multinational organisations.

The fact that many SWANU members stayed in Botswana for such a long period raises the question of what the refugees did all day. Interviews with them revealed surprisingly little. Evidently, many of the refugees simply stayed at the White House or later in the refugee camp without engaging in many activities.⁸⁹ Since there were many Ovaherero among the SWANU members, some took advantage of the situation by visiting their relatives in Mahalapye or Ngamiland.⁹⁰ While they were staying in eastern Botswana as refugees, there was little that Botswana's Ovaherero could do for them.

A few SWANU refugees, however, did look for employment. Willem Karamatha, the secretary of the representative committee and a qualified teacher, for example, temporarily taught at a secondary school in Gaborone.⁹¹ Zed Ngavirue points to the fact that many

⁸⁵ Botswana National Archives, OP 27/46, Notes for the Minister's meeting, 25.1.76

⁸⁶ Cf. Matlou 1992: p. 79–81

⁸⁷ See Chapter 4: Immigration and refugee legislation: Botswana, p. 63 ff.

⁸⁸ Cf. Matlou 1992: p. 88

⁸⁹ Cf. Interview with Charlotte Kauaria, 24.9.08

⁹⁰ Cf. Interview with Kanhangwa Albert Hambira, 13.9.08

⁹¹ Cf. Interview with Willem Karamatha, 23.9.08

SWANU refugees had received high school education and brought with them skills and qualifications that were not necessarily found in Botswana.⁹² Although this made them attractive personnel in Botswana, it also created high expectations with regard to potential scholarship opportunities. Some refugees therefore tried to contact foreign embassies in Gaborone, others merely waited for representatives from organisations like UNDP or the Otto-Benecke-Foundation to select students for bursaries.⁹³

In its annual report in 1976, the Botswana Council for Refugees asserted that SWANU refugees were difficult to deal with because they were not likely to adjust to the environment in Botswana.⁹⁴ In order to alleviate this situation, some of the SWANU refugees were sent to a construction project in Kanye, a self-contained unit, which was run by the representative of the German Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Klaus Helfer.⁹⁵ This project, the Rural Industries Promotion (RIP), had been set up by Helfer and the then vice-president, Quett Masire, for the purpose of developing small-scale industry in Botswana. A first group of 23 SWANU refugees was transferred from Francistown to Kanye in October 1976.⁹⁶ Permission to accommodate some of them was quickly granted by the government of Botswana; it was a relief to share the burden of accommodating all the SWANU refugees.⁹⁷ Even David Kasume, representative of the external wing of SWANU, sent a letter of thanks to Klaus Helfer.⁹⁸

The recipients, however, were not that impressed with the alternative accommodation. They complained that they were being exploited as cheap labour because they were still being given food by donor organisations, while they were not receiving anything from RIP.⁹⁹ In a letter to RIP the SWANU representatives deplored the whole project and their involvement:

Mr Helfer and his project want to destroy us as SWANU. We strongly condemn the action of Mr Helfer seeking alignment with the BCR, the UNHCR, the BCC, our supporting agencies plus government sectors to suppress and blackmail us.¹⁰⁰

⁹² Cf. Interview with Zed Ngavirue, 25.8.08

⁹³ Cf. Interview with Mesag Moruko, 3.10.08

⁹⁴ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/57, Director of Prisons to Permanent Secretary, Office of the President, 15.10.76

⁹⁵ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/56, Klaus Helfer to Administrative Secretary, Office of the President, 2.6.76

⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid., OP 27/57, Rural Industries Promotions to Administrative Secretary, Office of the President, 18.10.76

⁹⁷ Cf. Ibid., Rural Industries Promotions to SWANU Representative Committee, Francistown, 8.9.76

⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid., David Kasume, SWANU representative to Klaus Helfer, 10.6.76

⁹⁹ Cf. Interview with Mike Kauami, 22.9.08

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/57, SWANU Representative Committee, Francistown to RIP, 12.1.77

These complaints, though, went hand in glove with the negative perception RIP officials had of the working morale of the SWANU refugees. Some of the SWANU members were accused of indiscipline and violence.¹⁰¹ The UNHCR representative noticed the situation and was not content with what was happening in Kanye. He observed that

this particular group of refugees (SWANU) have acted in an unbecoming manner which is in sharp contrast to the hospitality and considerable assistance which has been made available to them by the Botswana government.¹⁰²

Consequently, Helfer decided that allowances for the refugees should be cut.¹⁰³ This, however, contradicts the claim made by the refugees, who stated that they had never received any money. Interestingly, there were also complaints that Ben Karamatha, the then vice-chairman of the representative committee, had become a security risk after having invited two foreign journalists to the camp in Kanye.¹⁰⁴ This judgement does not militate for confident handling of the problems in the camp; if there had not been anything to hide, there would be no problem in allowing journalists into the camp. At the least, it sounds rather disproportionate to threaten Ben Karamatha with expulsion from Kanye.¹⁰⁵

SWANU did confirm that the behaviour of some party members was not as befitting as could be expected from a person who had found refuge in a foreign country. Willem Karamatha points to the fact that some SWANU refugees might have been using “illegal substances” thereby supporting the allegations made by the RIP.¹⁰⁶

Shortly after this episode the engagement of SWANU refugees in the RIP project ended, as many of the workers were taken by the Otto-Benecke-Foundation for further study.¹⁰⁷ Attempts to involve some of the stranded Namibians in a normal working environment to lighten the workload of government authorities. It is not certain whether this project actually led to the exploitation of SWANU refugees. It is clear though that the lives of many SWANU refugees who came to Botswana from 1975 onwards were so unsatisfactory and frustrating that the pre-occupation with living conditions became more important than the prospects of personal advancement, or even participation in the liberation struggle. Many SWANU members wanted to fight for their country

¹⁰¹ Cf. Ibid., Rural Industries Promotions to SWANU Representative Committee, 31.12.76

¹⁰² Botswana National Archives, OP 27/57, Gary S Perkins (UNHCR) to Administrative Secretary, Office of the President, 26.1.77

¹⁰³ Cf. Ibid., Rural Industries Promotions to SWANU Representative Committee, 31.12.76

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Interview with Mike Kauami, 22.9.08

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Willem Karamatha, 23.9.08

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Ibid.

when they left, but grew disillusioned in Botswana. It took some years before the original idea of taking part in the liberation struggle was revived with the formation of the Revolutionary Council.

Attempts to launch an armed struggle

Plans of the External Council

The question of the armed struggle was one issue over which SWAPO and SWANU disagreed. Contemporary reports often create the impression that SWAPO was in favour of taking up arms, whereas SWANU was against it. While this can be attributed to the effective SWAPO propaganda machinery and the suggested importance of recent works on the liberation struggle such as Nujoma's *Where others wavered*,¹⁰⁸ it does not reflect the actual deliberations of SWANU on the liberation struggle. In his dissertation, Tony Emmett had already pointed to the fact that SWANU did not disagree with the idea of military training in principle, but simply had a different attitude towards how it should be done. Emmett wrote about SWANU's plans to "train a few cadres."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, there were SWANU members who received military training. Four SWANU members attended the Military Academy in Nanking in China in 1964, among them Moses Katjiuongua and Katjimuina Vei; several others received military training in Egypt at around the same time.¹¹⁰

The training these cadres received was somewhat different to that which SWAPO members underwent in their training camps, as it involved a lot of military leadership training.¹¹¹ This was a consequence of the concept SWANU had of the liberation struggle. This concept allowed for a small number of highly trained fighters to be infiltrated into Namibia where they would then establish bases to train others. The external leaders of SWANU did not believe that SWAPO's plans to organise a guerrilla army outside the country would be promising.¹¹² This tactic corresponds to the Foco theory of Che Guevara, which was later expanded theoretically by the French intellectual Régis Debray. Debray defines the *foco* as a minority which

establishes itself at the most vulnerable zone of the national territory, and then slowly spreads like an oil patch, propagating itself in concentric ripples through the peasant masses, to the smaller towns, and finally to the capital.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Saunders 2007: p. 22

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 333

¹¹⁰ Cf. Interview with Moses Katjiuongua, 21.8.08

¹¹¹ Cf. Interviews with Moses Katjiuongua, 21.8.08 and Zed Ngavirue, 25.8.08

¹¹² Cf. Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08

¹¹³ Debray 1965: p. 27

Debray argues for the importance of the *foco*, but later re-evaluates strategies for revolution and realises that it isolated the political from the military struggle. The ANC came to a similar conclusion. Joe Slovo, one of the leaders of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe, emphasized the significance of "political leadership" in the ANC's struggle for freedom. This has been elaborated on in a discussion paper on "armed struggle and democracy" by Martin Legassick.¹¹⁴ Yet, SWANU followed this approach theoretically and its military plans did not fail to materialise because the Foco theory was not feasible in Namibia. It would, moreover, have proven extremely difficult due to problems of a more general nature.

The SWANU leaders who had received military training in China and Egypt were expected to return secretly to Namibia to train others. Although at that time SWANU was still in a position to obtain international assistance, mainly from China, the military plans were ill-conceived and failed as no open route for SWANU to infiltrate its people back into Namibia existed at that time. Furthermore, the SWANU leadership had not adequately elaborated on the actions following the trained fighters' return from their training. Moses Katjiuongua remembers an exchange of letters with Kozonguizi in London on this matter. Katjiuongua remembers that Kozonguizi wrote:

You know why you went to Beijing. So you should also know the next move to do.¹¹⁵

The only attempts to further develop the military plans were made by Claudius Kandjou. He was ordered by the External Council to find a way for trained SWANU soldiers to get back into Namibia. As the Caprivi was heavily patrolled by the South Africans and was later used by SWAPO, Botswana seemed to be the only option. However, the divisions between SWANU and the Chief's Council would have made it difficult for SWANU to infiltrate its members into the Herero territories in eastern Namibia. This is why Claudius Kandjou looked to north-western Botswana on his mission in 1965. Kandjou explains that:

[...] from Botswana it was basically easier between Botswana and western Zambia and Caprivi. We would go through Chobe, and then once you were in Chobe you could then go to the Achab mountains all the way. You come through there trying to get through Botswana between Botswana and Caprivi. You come through Shakawe or you come through the WENELA point there. [...] Just Botswana from Kazangula would have been difficult.¹¹⁶

Zambia would not allow SWANU fighters through her territory, as the organisation was not officially supported by the OAU. Yet, SWANU never seriously attempted to infiltrate

¹¹⁴ Legassick 2002: pp. 26–27

¹¹⁵ Interview with Moses Katjiuongua, 21.8.08

¹¹⁶ Interview with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08

her soldiers back into Namibia via Botswana, on account of declining international support. The External Council, while looking for new orientation after Kozonguizi's sudden departure in 1966, realised that Botswana would try to prevent them from return to Namibia, since it did not allow any trained fighters to return to their home country via her territory. However, under Charles Kauraisa as chairman of the External Council, another attempt was made to re-establish contacts with the home front and with SWANU members in Botswana. This mission, the so-called "Positive Action Campaign", was supported by the Chinese. Kauraisa, who was meant to travel to Botswana, never made the necessary contacts, and eventually the Chinese lost interest when they discovered SWANU's lack of seriousness to realise plans for an armed struggle.¹¹⁷

In his thesis Zed Ngavirue alludes to SWANU's tendency to theorise the liberation struggle.¹¹⁸ SWANU's approach to the infiltration problem provides striking evidence of this. SWANU party leaders were well aware of the fact that infiltration back into Namibia posed a challenge but, while they were still reflecting on potential options via Botswana, SWAPO's military wing, PLAN, was already involved in the first clashes with the South African army.

The Revolutionary Council

We have come to know that quite a number of those SWANU refugees that left from 1975 onwards originally intended to get military training, and were then disillusioned in Botswana when confronted with the limited options. The grievances many SWANU refugees experienced during their lengthy stay in Botswana, and the desire to actively fight for the independence of their home country, eventually led to the formation of the Revolutionary Council in the refugee camp in Dukwe in December 1981. The term "Revolutionary Council" seemed to have been adopted from the South African ANC, which had installed an organ named the "Revolutionary Council", after the Morogoro Conference in 1969. The ANC's Revolutionary Council was an instrument created to co-ordinate military and underground activities and it remained in existence until the formation of the Political-Military Council in 1983.¹¹⁹ At the time of the Morogoro Conference (1969) when the ANC already had its military structures in place, SWANU could not claim that it had carried out any single military activity. Nonetheless, in the 1970s efforts had been made to participate in SWAPO's struggle. After having consulted the Zambian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rupiah Banda, Zed Ngavirue made an attempt

¹¹⁷ Cf. Interviews with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08 and Moses Katjiuongua, 21.8.08

¹¹⁸ Cf. Ngavirue 1997: p. 338

¹¹⁹ Cf. Schleicher 2004: pp. 54–59

in 1976 on behalf of the SWANU External Council to ask SWAPO for the inclusion of SWANU's trained cadres. As Sam Nujoma had refused to see him, Ngavirue approached Peter Mueshihange and Moses Garoeb in Lusaka and Peter Nanyemba on a flight to West Africa; in the end SWANU's offer was rejected.¹²⁰

With these experiences in mind, the Revolutionary Council decided to operate in two arenas: the diplomatic and that of practical training.¹²¹ In the diplomatic arena, efforts were made to solicit funds from various governments deemed to be sympathetic. Financial contributions would have been just as welcome as an offer of military training. Because of the old links, China was one of SWANU's most important addressees of its endeavours. Other countries that were approached by representatives of the Revolutionary Council (around 1986) were Vietnam and Nicaragua.¹²² SWANU representatives also called on the Libyan Embassy in Bonn and the representative of Albania in Vienna.¹²³ However, all these requests were rejected. This is not surprising considering the fact that, during the eighties, international negotiations on Namibia became more pressing and therefore potential donor countries might have considered it unnecessary to open up another military front. Besides, the negative example of Angola, where the three liberation movements that had been supported during the liberation struggle ultimately fought each other, still stuck in everybody's mind, and it was therefore deemed unwise to support a second Namibian movement in its military endeavours.

Thus, the centre of activity in Botswana of the Revolutionary Council was the refugee camp in Dukwe. After having studied Germany, Uatjindjua Ndjove, one of the former members of the SWANU representative committee in Botswana, returned to Dukwe and became chairman of the Revolutionary Council from its inception. Military training abroad was not possible due to the lack of support, therefore the Revolutionary Council tried to take advantage of the human resources that were available in the camp. Since the commencement of the repatriation of Zimbabwean refugees, the camp in Dukwe was populated by South African and Angolan refugees. Some of them had already received military training, or were even in possession of weapons. Rihupisa Kandando explains how this circumstance led to some kind of military training of SWANU cadres in the refugee camp:

People were basically trained in Dukwe. It was not a big group. In Dukwe there were also a lot of weapons. There were also people from Angola, from PAC [i.e. Pan African Congress from South Africa], also people from the Black Consciousness Movement. So through

¹²⁰ Cf. Interviews with Zed Ngavirue, 25.8.08 and Charles Kauraisa, 18.9.08

¹²¹ Cf. Interviews with Rihupisa Kandando, 20.8.08 and Sam Haukongo, 2.10.08

¹²² Cf. Interviews with Eddie Tjirare, 23.8.08 and Rihupisa Kandando, 20.8.08

¹²³ Cf. Interview with Festus Tjikua, 25.9.08

some of those contacts we managed to train a few people. But the idea was, once everything was on course, to come back to Namibia and engage in guerrilla activity.¹²⁴

Festus Tjikua, one of the main initiators of the Revolutionary Council, maintains, however, that most of the training was theoretical. Of course, any military activity was prohibited in Botswana, and therefore any such activity had to take place underground.¹²⁵ Interestingly, SWANU did not tap into its full potential by taking advantage of the knowledge of those SWANU members who had undergone military training in the 1960s. Kandando attributes this to their progressing age,¹²⁶ but it also seems likely that other old SWANU cadres had lost interest in the endeavours of the young SWANU revolutionaries. Moses Katjiuongua, for example, describes the members of SWANU's Revolutionary Council as only "revolutionary in the mouth",¹²⁷ while others might have simply preferred their life in exile.

SWANU's revolutionary activities in the camp did not have any impact on the liberation struggle. Firstly, because the training in Dukwe could not be compared to proper military training in a military camp, where one could freely exercise and, secondly, because the activities in Dukwe never led to any military activity by SWANU. Symptomatic of this was Festus Tjikua's explanation of how the Revolutionary Council prepared to rigorously follow Mao Tse Tung's dogmas in the planned guerrilla struggle.¹²⁸ Once again, theoretical plans were far ahead of the real conditions SWANU was facing in its endeavours to liberate Namibia.

Conclusion

The preceding account suggests that the territory of Botswana provided an important location for SWANU, both with regard to the transit into exile and as a venue for the activities of external and internal leadership. Without this, communication with the home front would have been far more difficult. Furthermore, agents such as Daniel Munamava, Ambrosius Kandji and Werner Mamugwe proved absolutely essential for facilitating the refugee traffic. SWANU made use of the existing structures in Ngamiland, in Sehitwa in particular, and even tried to amplify the support it received in the area. However, both in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and in Botswana, SWANU was faced with many logistical difficulties. These were due to the vastness of the country, organisational deficiencies

¹²⁴ Interview with Rihupisa Kandando, 20.8.08

¹²⁵ Cf. Interview with Festus Tjikua, 25.9.08

¹²⁶ Cf. Interview with Rihupisa Kandando, 20.8.08

¹²⁷ Interview with Moses Katjiuongua, 21.8.08

¹²⁸ Cf. Interview with Festus Tjikua, 25.9.08

and the fact that well-known SWANU leaders could not move around as freely as they would have liked. The resources at the disposal of protectorate and Botswana officials were limited, and the policy of declaring refugees prohibited immigrants after their departure, proved efficient in reducing SWANU's activity. Nonetheless, despite some negative experiences such as the detention of the three leaders in Maun in 1966, Botswana handling of SWANU was liberal and party members were not reined in too much by the British. At the same time, SWANU officials made sure they did not provide the authorities with a motive for curtailing their freedom of action. After independence the situation became more strained, but this can be attributed to SWANU's growing international unpopularity and the simple fact that, by then, most leading figures in SWANU had been declared prohibited immigrants. That apart, the Botswana government was anything but hostile to SWANU. SWANU members often felt as if they were treated as second-class refugees. This was not due to any provision from Gaborone, but was more a consequence of SWANU's failure to garner more international support.

This chapter further illustrated that, although in the long run SWANU did not prove to be efficient in its endeavours to advocate Namibian independence, it still enjoyed popularity and possessed an organisational structure that included contacts in Botswana. SWANU's activism in the early 1960s was, despite the lack of concrete military plans, in no way inferior to that of SWAPO. The frequent visits of leading SWANU members in Bechuanaland and Botswana showed that Namibia's eastern neighbour played a substantial role in SWANU's fight for freedom.

Yet, from SWANU's perspective, Botswana failed the organisation in certain respects. Many SWANU refugees who left Namibia from 1975 onwards were abandoned to their fate. Furthermore, the failure of SWANU's missions to engage in military struggle is connected to Botswana. Plans in the 1960s failed because Botswana could hardly serve as a transit station for returning soldiers. The Revolutionary Council was founded in Botswana, but while diplomatic missions were unsuccessful, the training in the refugee camp in Dukwe was in no way a good preparation for guerrilla war, the time for which had, in any event, passed.

7 SWAPO

SWAPO was the dominant force in the Namibian liberation struggle. As the fight for independence progressed, Sam Nujoma's organisation was able to solicit more and more support from various donor countries and the ALC and could thus rely on many different partners. Botswana, however, as we have seen, did not recognise SWAPO's special role as the "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people", although the government in Gaborone was well aware that SWAPO was more efficient than SWANU, let alone NUDO.

In the previous chapter, we established the role Botswana had played for SWAPO's antagonist, SWANU. Considering the developments in Angola and the sudden interruption of the refugee flow in 1966/67, it stands to reason that Botswana was of importance for SWAPO mainly during pre-independence days. This chapter will predominantly look at the first exodus of SWAPO members between 1960 and 1966. But, as SWAPO managed to strengthen its structures in Botswana throughout the years, it seems important to look at these established structures as well.

SWAPO officially launched its armed struggle in 1966. From that time it must therefore have been clear to the government of Botswana that many SWAPO refugees fleeing via Botswana did so for the purpose of receiving military training. This chapter deals with the impact of this on SWAPO members in Botswana. We have to remember that Botswana was not opposed to the armed struggle as such, but rather to any military activity on her territory and even the carrying of arms was out of question. The acquiescence in SWAPO's activities, which were only indirectly connected to the armed resistance, was, as we will come to see, a balancing act for the authorities in Botswana.

Writing on the liberation struggle in Angola, John A. Marcum asserts, "external moral and material support can prove crucial, even decisive, to the fortunes of an insurgent and/or exile movement."¹ In the case of Botswana it is clear that the country could only provide moral support to SWAPO but, Marcum continues, the complete absence of support could also considerably weaken a liberation movement in its endeavours.² Although SWAPO never fought as intensely as the parties in the Angolan liberation struggle, it will be worthwhile to look at the impact of exile activities in Botswana on SWAPO's efforts to liberate Namibia.

¹ Marcum 1978: p. 221

² Cf. Ibid.

Exile politics could be strenuous and difficult. Schleicher remarks that for many ANC members in exile the liberation struggle was a fight for survival and it imposed clear restraints on social life.³ There was, of course, always a shortage of funds for SWAPO in exile. One has to remember that, for SWAPO, Botswana was mainly a transit country and living conditions for SWAPO politicians in exile might have been more severe in other countries of permanent residence. Nonetheless, the status of the SWAPO refugees will be detailed in this chapter.

SWAPO's structures on the way to exile

Preparation for exile

In most cases SWAPO members left South West Africa along the route used by most SWANU refugees; they departed from the central areas in South West Africa via the Herero areas in the present Omaheke province. In the beginning, when there was still unity between SWAPO and the Chief's Council, Hosea Kutako and his people played a substantial role in preparing the prospective freedom fighters for their transit, by making arrangements for them with the Ovaherero in Bechuanaland.⁴ This way the establishment of contacts in the protectorate was not solely up to the refugees – a hurdle, which many of SWAPO's would-be freedom fighters did not want to jump after relations with the Chief's Council, had declined. Yet, when Sam Nujoma and Paul Helmuth left in 1960 and 1961 respectively, the Ovaherero on both sides of the border helped a great deal.

The majority of SWAPO members, who were planning their escape into exile, did not enter the Bechuanaland Protectorate from the area around the Buitepos Border Gate at Mamuno (see Fig. 21), because they were from the northern regions of Namibia. They received clear instructions from Andimba Toivo yaToivo, the founder member of the OPC, who was under house arrest in his home town, Ondangwa, after his deportation from Cape Town. Toivo knew Bechuanaland well. He had used the same route that many of SWANU and SWAPO members would later take, when he returned after the Second World War to work in South Africa. He was therefore not only the SWAPO organizer in Ovamboland, but also the ideal person to advise SWAPO comrades on how they should proceed on their journey. Prospective freedom fighters occasionally complained about his impersonal nature, but it was clear that he was under constant observation by either South African security or tribal leaders under whose supervision he was, and therefore too personal a relationship with potential political activists would have aroused suspicion.

³ Schleicher 2004: pp. 49–51

⁴ Cf. Interview with Paul Helmuth, 15.8.08

Asser Namupala Mudhika, who received his instructions from Toivo in January 1966, remembered the briefing by Toivo. He recalls:

First of all he told us, that we had to maintain high discipline. We had to adapt ourselves to any situation. If we moved to a certain area, we had to behave exactly like those people behaved. He also advised us, that we had to try by all means not to use any European language because then they could detect us. The third thing, which he told us, was, that we must keep ourselves dirty, so that we were no different from the rest so that we looked like those villagers.⁵

This seemed to be helpful advice for people who, up until their escape, had not been exposed to anything more than their particular area in Ovamboland. Still, they can be regarded as the very basics for the preparation of guerrilla warfare. Revolutionaries like Che Guevara kept on emphasizing the importance of discipline and secrecy.⁶ Toivo made sure, that SWAPO members who were willing to go into exile always left in groups, so that they could assist and protect each other.⁷ The procedure, that prospective refugees were given instructions by Toivo on how to flee via Botswana, came to an end when Toivo was sentenced in 1968 and subsequently sent to Robben Island.

In many instances, SWAPO refugees were not given membership cards, because this way the South African Police would not have any proof of their intentions should they be caught. The refugees were provided with SWAPO documents once they reached the office in Francistown. This once led to the paradoxical situation that a group of SWAPO refugees, who had surprisingly managed to get to Zambia through Angola in 1964, had to return to Bechuanaland to register at the Francistown office and to receive SWAPO membership cards. Solomon Hidinua, who was part of that group, maintains that had they not done so, they might have been mistaken for spies in Tanzania.⁸ The allegation of espionage was a common charge during the liberation struggle. It is interesting that at this early stage of the liberation struggle it was already an issue that some members were concerned about.

The route into exile

The way to Botswana

Analysing the routes SWAPO refugees and prospective freedom fighters took when they fled into the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana respectively, one can distinguish four different routes. The first was via eastern Namibia, which was used by SWANU

⁵ Interview with Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08

⁶ Cf. Hahlweg 1968: p. 184 and Kurnitzky 1968: p. 76

⁷ Cf. Interview with Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08

⁸ Cf. Interview with Solomon Hidinua, 31.8.08

members and which has been described in chapter 6. The first SWAPO members who fled South West Africa took this route. However, as the majority of SWAPO members were Ovambo, it goes without saying that it was easier for them to escape further north into the territory. They therefore entered Botswana from western Caprivi, arriving first at Shakawe in northern Ngamiland. From there they proceeded to Sehitwa and continued along the route from Ghanzi to Maun. This was a dangerous option because the Caprivi Strip was heavily patrolled by the South Africans. Sometimes the refugees were able to catch a lift with truck drivers; on other occasions they simply walked.⁹ Catching lifts was, however, not free of danger. Many of the refugees could not afford the transport from Ovamboland to the Caprivi and then into Botswana. This is why they chose to register as mine workers with the recruiting organisation SWANLA (South West Africa Native Labour Association) in Rundu in the Kavango region that would then take them to Botswana. The following subsection will focus on this aspect.

Another option was the route through South Africa. This was the usual option for those who had been employed in the South African mines and who returned via Bechuanaland, not necessarily with the intention of joining SWAPO in Francistown. In the early years of the liberation struggle, there were, however, a few exceptions among SWAPO refugees, who went by train all the way through southern Namibia and South Africa to Mafikeng, where they crossed the border into Bechuanaland.¹⁰

Finally, there were a number of Caprivians who fled South West Africa during the liberation struggle. Many of them crossed the border in the area of Satau, often in a *mokoro*, the traditional canoe, then headed for Kazungula.¹¹ Some of the Caprivians held SWAPO cards, others held membership cards of the Caprivi African National Union (CANU), which had merged with SWAPO in 1964. Several of the CANU party cardholders admitted that they had been forced to purchase a CANU membership card when they were simply looking for asylum in Botswana,¹² just as those Caprivians who had fled the intensifying guerrilla activities in the end of the 1960s. Consequently, they were provided with food, which was sponsored mainly by the World Food Programme, together with the masses of Angolan refugees, who also entered in the same area.¹³

⁹ Cf. Interviews with Nahas Angula, 13.8.08 and Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08

¹⁰ Cf. Interview with Theo-Ben Gurirab, 10.9.08

¹¹ Cf. Interview with Vincent Mulisa Kwenani, 9.9.08

¹² Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/18, Special Branch Officer, Kasane to Chairman, Kasane Refugee Committee, 28.11.68

¹³ Cf. Ibid., OP 55/20, PJ Heady to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local government and Commissioner of Police, 13.11.68

The WENELA option

SWANU's founding president Jariretundu Kozonguizi got to the point of mentioning the advantages of SWAPO compared with SWANU in recruiting members:

SWANU did not have the historical accident of a mass of their members finding themselves abroad and from whom the surplus could be shorn off and diverted into 'military' training.¹⁴

With this slightly exaggerated formulation, Kozonguizi alludes to the fact that an essential part of those freedom fighters that constituted the base of the first trained PLAN fighters, were made up of former mine workers returning from the mines in South Africa. These had been brought to the WENELA camp in Francistown, from where they were to be flown back to the Kavango area in South West Africa. Indeed, Emmet ascertained that these returning mine workers accounted for the base of the first PLAN commandos.¹⁵ This is corroborated by Nahas Angula who admits that, although low in number, they were the "core" of the future guerrilla army.¹⁶ Among these first recruits were John Nankhudu ya Otto and Lazarus Sankala, who quickly ascended up the ranks of PLAN. Along with other mineworkers, they had been sensitised to the liberation struggle and the necessity of fighting for independence.¹⁷ Thus, they posed an easy target for recruitment into SWAPO's army. Even for Namibia's current president, Hifikepunye Pohamba, work on the South African mines (in his particular case in the Sparwater Mine in the Transvaal) was the starting point into exile. He had already been a SWAPO member before he went to work on the mines. Using the customary return path that was the train from Johannesburg to Francistown, he never entered the WENELA camp, but directly left to look for the SWAPO representative.¹⁸

Kozonguizi's complaint is understandable in that those Namibians working on South African mines were almost exclusively Ovambo and, consequently, more attracted to SWAPO than to SWANU. However, SWANU never had a representative in Francistown, where the mineworkers would arrive at the WENELA camp, after having worked in South Africa. When looking at the WENELA operations in Botswana, one must admit that a large number of those Namibians using WENELA carriers, never went to work on the South African mines at all. Many SWAPO members from Ovamboland simply used the transport of WENELA to get into Botswana, from where they planned to continue their journey into exile. In order to clarify their use of the WENELA transport system, we

¹⁴ Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, No. 4

¹⁵ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 268

¹⁶ Interview with Nahas Angula, 13.8.08

¹⁷ Cf. Emmett 1999: pp. 267–268 and Interview with Lazarus Sankala, 9.9.08

¹⁸ Cf. Interview with Hifikepunye Pohamba, 30.9.08

first need to look at the stages in the WENELA recruitment process with regard to South West Africa, Botswana and South Africa.

The roots of WENELA go back to 1897, when the Transvaal Republic and the Portuguese authorities signed the first formal agreement regulating labour migration from Mozambique to the mines on the Witwatersrand. WENELA had been established exclusively to recruit mine workers from Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique.¹⁹ The northernmost base of WENELA was set up in Francistown and hence made the town a significant stopping-off centre for migrant workers.²⁰ In South West Africa, however, it was SWANLA, which had, from 1943, the sole right to recruit workers for the South African mines.²¹ The registered office of SWANLA was in Grootfontein; the recruiting station was, however, in the Kavango region, in Rundu. This recruiting station was not only open to Namibians. In particular, it was established for Angolans intending to work on South African mines. The selection of applicants took place in Rundu, and whoever qualified to work on the mines was transported to Shakawe in Bechuanaland by truck. The recruits were flown to Francistown, where they spent a couple of days in the WENELA camp before being taken to the mines in South Africa by train.²²

All the refugees who were planning to leave South West Africa therefore had to get to Rundu first. In fact, it was only necessary to reach Nkurenkuru in western Kavango, which was closer to Ovamboland. SWANLA trucks would then take the refugees, who were masquerading as potential mineworkers, to Rundu, where they were then put to the acid test.²³ For some refugees, the WENELA route was out of the question from the outset because they had not reached the necessary age to work on the mines. For this group was no other way than to use the same route walking or by organising their own transport.²⁴

Those who were old enough to present themselves in Rundu awaited a humiliating selection procedure. Samson Ndeikwila, who went through the WENELA system in 1965 before escaping in Bechuanaland, gives an accurate account on how the selection was done:

We had to strip naked all of us and enter a very big hole. Then we lined up along a wall and we were made to jump for a very long time. While we were jumping and sweating many people started to cough. Then the health inspectors were going around. Anybody who was indicating that he was not healthy was disqualified. It was a very strenuous exercise and many people were disqualified. The so-called doctor in a white coat had a stick while we

¹⁹ Cf. Pusch 2008, pp. 10–17

²⁰ Cf. Mgadla 1987: p. 138

²¹ Cf. Cooper 2001: p. 127

²² Cf. Interviews with Matthew Shejvali, 5.10.08 and Elias Hauliondjaba, 17.9.08

²³ Cf. Interview with Matthew Shejvali, 5.10.08

²⁴ Cf. Interview with Nahas Angula, 13.8.08

were jumping and he was then looking at the tip of your penis. They said, all those who had some venereal diseases some water of their penises would come out. Again we saw some people being disqualified. After that you had to bow on the wall so that they could see your anus so that they could detect other diseases.²⁵

Despite this degrading procedure, many SWAPO refugees shouldered the selection process because it was an inexpensive and reasonably safe way to reach Bechuanaland. The labourers who were selected to proceed to South Africa had to undergo the next demeaning process when they arrived in Shakawe, where the vaccinations took place. Samson Ndeikwila recalls:

We stood in a long queue. The so-called doctors now came with the big injection. Now they injected us, about four or five people, until the cylinder got empty. Then they filled it again. They said, that that injection was to make us strong, so that we didn't get tired when we worked in the mines. After that we all had a swollen shoulder and felt very dizzy.²⁶

The plane flight carrying the prospective mine workers to Francistown, was nothing more than a continuation of the harsh processes already endured. Jesaya Nyamu likens the planes to those being used for cattle,²⁷ and Samson Ndeikwila remembers that there were only "things like ropes where we could hold"²⁸ on the plane. From Francistown airport, the future mine workers, and those masquerading as such, were directly taken to the WENELA camp. This was a huge compound used to house mineworkers from different southern African territories who were either returning from, or going to the mines in South Africa.

At first glance it appeared strange that mineworkers, destined to work in South Africa, landed in Bechuanaland and not directly in South Africa. After all, WENELA could have avoided the upkeep of the compound in Francistown and the logistical challenge of sending the recruits to Johannesburg by train. The transport of mineworkers was, however, a massive procedure. Up to a hundred thousand labourers a year passed through the WENELA camp in Francistown. Prevailing opinion in South Africa was that conservative whites in apartheid South Africa might be concerned at the sight of these black masses getting out of an aeroplane at a South African airport. This practice was therefore shifted to South Africa's northern neighbour, where WENELA had long since bought land for this purpose. Without doubt, Francistown benefited economically from WENELA; the mineworkers in the camp spent money in the compound. On the other hand, the

²⁵ Interview with Samson Ndeikwila, 29.8.08

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Cf. Interview with Jesaya Nyamu, 25.8.08

²⁸ Interview with Samson Ndeikwila, 29.8.08

presence of masses of mine workers exerted a negative social impact, not least the expansion of prostitution and drug abuse.²⁹

The next challenge that awaited the potential refugees was escape from the camp. In the first years when this mode of travelling was practised, the escape was reasonably simple, because the future mine workers were allowed to leave the camp during the day. By simply not returning to camp, the escape was already carried out. Difficulties developed when the SWAPO representative in Francistown demanded that all the equipment the mineworkers were provided with, especially blankets, had to be brought along as well, so that SWAPO gained some material benefit. This made escape only possible at night.³⁰ In practical terms an escape from the WENELA camp necessitated a change of name when the refugees were taken to the District Commissioner by the SWAPO representative, so that they could register. It would otherwise have been easy for WENELA officials to identify the escapees simply by looking at the refugee register.³¹

Later, by the mid sixties, WENELA discovered that the number of registered people in Rundu did not correspond to the number of labourers arriving at the mines in Johannesburg. South Africans realised that, while it was her intention to support the economy with WENELA and thereby ultimately to stabilise apartheid structures, the WENELA recruitment system had the opposite effect. It helped people to leave the country, who were prepared to do everything for the overthrow of Apartheid.³² The British authorities had been aware of this practice³³ but only intervened when WENELA officials put pressure on them. In fact, there was not much the British could do about it besides redirecting this pressure onto the SWAPO representative in Francistown by declaring that SWAPO would not be as free in its actions as previously, if this SWAPO policy continued.³⁴ In cases where WENELA officials detected South West Africans who had escaped from the camp, they were arrested, sometimes beaten up and imprisoned, or sent back to Rundu.³⁵

By the end of 1965, internal communication within SWAPO made it very clear that the exploitation of the WENELA transport system had become dangerous. Asser Namupala Mudhika, who consequently avoided the WENELA option when he left the country in early 1966, asserts that:

²⁹ Cf. Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

³⁰ Cf. Interviews with Jesaya Nyamu, 25.8.08 and Phillemon Ndeutapo, 23.9.08

³¹ Cf. Interviews with Nangolo Mbumba, 2.10.08 and Helao Shityuwete, 15.8.08

³² Cf. Interview with Phillemon Ndeutapo, 23.9.08

³³ Cf. Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

³⁴ Cf. Interview with Haimbodi ya Nambinga-Kati, 12.9.08

³⁵ Cf. Interviews with Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08, Haimbodi ya Nambinga-Kati, 12.9.08 and Nangolo Mbumba, 2.10.08

we received [a letter] from ja Toivo [...] that we should not associate ourselves with any WENELA activities. This simply meant that we had to march from Ondangwa up to Botswana. Further than that a letter which was written by Nahas [Angula], [Nangolo] Mbumba and others made it very, very clear that any SWAPO member who was coming from home must not associate himself with WENELA.³⁶

While Maxton Joseph had, as we will come to see in section 7.2 (p. 158 ff.), been very active in recruiting people from the WENELA camp, his successor became more cautious even advising people to go to the mines first and join SWAPO on their return from South Africa.³⁷

Nevertheless, the practice of joining WENELA in Rundu and later leaving the compound in Francistown proved very effective during the first half of the 1960s. Many SWAPO refugees managed to leave South West Africa this way. Even after WENELA officials had discovered this practice, there were still occasional refugees who, up until the 1970s, took advantage of the WENELA transport system.³⁸

SWAPO refugees in Botswana

The fact that SWAPO had a representative in Francistown meant that the transport of refugees and freedom fighters could be arranged from there. On the way to Francistown, though, most SWAPO members had to fend for themselves. This led to the first feelings of disenchantment among some of the refugees, who had expected to be helped by SWAPO officials as soon as they were in Bechuanaland. Helao Shityuwete recalls:

It was almost that we were not quite prepared to what we experienced the first night because we were made to believe that once you cross the border, help would easily be available because we were told that SWAPO's cars will be on the other side of the Botswana border, so once you are on the other side of the border you are already in good hands. It wasn't like that.³⁹

Once again, it seems as if high expectations had been created among potential refugees in South West Africa. In fact, many SWAPO members left their country with tremendous confidence in their organisation. From interviews that were conducted with SWAPO members by the Refugee Advisory Committees, one can conclude that the relationship between the prospective freedom fighters and SWAPO was affected by a feeling of bondage and blind trust. In many instances, SWAPO refugees declared before the committees

³⁶ Interview with Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08

³⁷ Cf. Interviews with Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08 and Samson Ndeikwila, 29.8.08

³⁸ Botswana National Archives, OP 27/6, Head of Special Branch to Permanent Secretary to the President, 9.1.75

³⁹ Interview with Helao Shityuwete, 15.8.08

that they were prepared to do anything they were told to do by SWAPO.⁴⁰ For most of these SWAPO refugees in Botswana in the late sixties, it seemed clear that this would most probably mean that they would go for military training. Normally, it was not up to the members to decide whether to seek further education or go for military training.⁴¹ Many SWAPO members who arrived in Botswana in the 1960s, were simply uninformed about SWAPO generally, and about the possible opportunities that might await them. The statement of one refugee, asked why he had left Namibia, illustrates these misconceptions. He answered: "I want to become a mechanic or a doctor of philosophy."⁴²

The majority of the SWAPO refugees were thus an easy target for the organisation that decided, on their behalf, where they would be sent. Steve Motinga, who came through Botswana, phrases it accordingly:

[...] once you got out on the other side until going to the front nobody asked you whether you wanted to go there, the same with going to school. They simply collected you in the camp [...]⁴³

Once the refugees were in Francistown, the SWAPO representative took care of them. Firstly, by making sure they registered and claimed political asylum in order to benefit from the allowances of the various welfare organisations and, secondly, by trying to arrange further transport for them. Although this meant that SWAPO had a clear advantage in logistical terms compared with SWANU, the processing of refugees was not always that simple, due to a constant shortage of funds. The SWAPO representative in Francistown thus had to be very creative in finding ways and means to get his fellow party members out of Botswana, mostly via Kazungula into Zambia. In many instances close co-operation with liberation movements from other countries, especially the ANC, was necessary. Although not all southern African liberation movements, either from the same country or from different countries, co-operated well, there was a great amount of solidarity among the liberation movements in Francistown. On several occasions SWAPO members used the transport the ANC provided and SWAPO would have willingly assisted ANC members with transport, if the need had arisen.⁴⁴

In the 1970s, when only few SWAPO refugees had left Namibia via Botswana, the transport situation eased. As has been noted, SWAPO refugees never stayed in Botswana for long periods. There were exceptions, but the majority found educational opportunities or went straight for military training after only a short stay in Botswana.

⁴⁰ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/26, Refugee Advisory Committee Reports, Francistown

⁴¹ Cf. Interview with Haimbodi ya Nambinga-Kati, 12.9.08

⁴² Botswana National Archives, OP 55/28, Refugee Advisory Committee Reports, Francistown

⁴³ Interview with Steve Motinga, 1.10.08

⁴⁴ Cf. Interviews with Helao Shityuwete, 15.8.08 and Jesaya Nyamu, 25.8.08

The route via Zambia was open to SWAPO, although occasional delays were encountered at the border in Kazungula. One instance involved current cabinet members Nangolo Mbumba, Nahas Angula and Helmut Angula, who were forced to hold out in Kazungula for almost six months in 1966, while Nujoma and Pohamba were waiting for them on the other side of the border. The group, consisting of almost thirty people, was only accepted by Zambia after SWAPO presented documents that clearly stated the recipient country would accept the refugees and successfully resolving the additional issue of some SWAPO members being allowed to study at Nkumbi College in Kabwe.⁴⁵ Even ten years later, a large group of SWAPO refugees awaited clearance from Zambia for several months, before being allowed to leave the area of Kazungula and Kasane. The fact that Zambian authorities tended to be unpredictable at times, made it necessary for Botswana, with the support of welfare organisations, to build a reception centre in Kasane with basic facilities for the refugees.⁴⁶

Overall the transit of SWAPO refugees through Botswana ran relatively smoothly. The demands of the refugees were quite moderate and the SWAPO office in Francistown helped a great deal to facilitate the movements.

SWAPO's structures in Botswana

SWAPO had a good sense of the strategic importance of Francistown. Admittedly, SWANU's base in Sehitwa was situated along the refugees' route, but Francistown was the location that (due to its relative proximity to the other colonial or white-minority ruled territories), attracted the liberation movements from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and, of course, Namibia. Hence the refugees and freedom fighters could more easily make their voices heard, and co-operation among the liberation movements was possible to a certain extent, as other movements, for example, the ANC, the PAC or ZAPU also had their representatives in Francistown.⁴⁷

In the early 1960s, however, SWAPO's presence was not yet felt in Francistown, let alone in the rest of the Bechuanaland Protectorate.⁴⁸ In 1961 SWAPO had its first representative in Francistown when Maxton Joseph Mutongulume came to the British protectorate from Cape Town,⁴⁹ although he and even his successor, Gideon Kasheta, operated

⁴⁵ Cf. Interviews with Nangolo Mbumba, 2.10.08 and Helmut Angula, 25.9.08

⁴⁶ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/56, Perkins (UNHCR) to JF Engers (Principal Officer, Commission for Namibia), 9.10.75

⁴⁷ Cf. Interview with Asser Namupala Mudhika, 22.8.08

⁴⁸ Cf. Interviews with Hidipo Hamutenya, 6.10.08 and Zed Ngavirue, 25.8.08

⁴⁹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/141, 26, Extract of the Central Intelligence Committee Report, January 1962

from their homes.⁵⁰ From time to time, new representatives were appointed to represent SWAPO in Francistown, to ensure the SWAPO representative did not become too well known in Botswana, or in order for the former representative to be promoted. An office was only established in the early 1970s,⁵¹ when it was needed for facilitation of the increasing communication between internal and external SWAPO. Other liberation movements experienced similar problems with the establishment of offices abroad. In the case of the ANC, Schleicher points out that even in the 1980s, the ANC office in London was not much more than a “disarrangement of small rooms behind a shabby shop-front, next to a Greek restaurant.”⁵²

The Botswana government knew about the existence of this office, but as long as there were no evident activities in contravention of the clauses for refugees, the SWAPO representative was not barred from his activities.⁵³ Nonetheless, even before the official inception of the SWAPO office in Francistown, the SWAPO representatives, especially Maxton Joseph, arranged a more suitable utilisation of the circumstances in Francistown and surroundings for the business of SWAPO. In the following subsection, an account of the activities of the SWAPO representatives in Francistown will illustrate the organisation of SWAPO in Botswana and give further insight into transit, recruitments and co-operation with opposition parties.

SWAPO representatives in Francistown

The detailed account of the first SWAPO representatives serves to underline the importance of SWAPO’s representation in Francistown in the initial years of the liberation struggle. It will help to identify the personal differences in the characters of the representatives and track the development of SWAPO’s actions in Botswana.

Maxton Joseph Mutongulume

Without any doubt, Maxton Joseph Mutongulume can be regarded as the most active of all SWAPO representatives in Francistown. SWAPO veterans are full of praise for him and his dedicated work for SWAPO. Many SWANU members appreciated his help when they were stranded in Botswana. Maxton Joseph was certainly no intellectual. He had little formal education, but he commanded a distinct sense of shrewdness which made him valuable and, indeed, almost indispensable to the endeavours of SWAPO in

⁵⁰ Cf. Interview with Jesaya Nyamu

⁵¹ Cf. Interview with Alex Meroro, 26.8.08

⁵² Schleicher 2004: p. 49

⁵³ Cf. Interview with Quett Masire, 27.6.08

Botswana.⁵⁴ Phillemon Kanime, who had gone into exile through Bechuanaland in 1962, recalls that Maxton Joseph:

was instrumental to us because he was well established in the communities and well known among the political parties, also a very outgoing and hard working person.⁵⁵

Indeed, Maxton Joseph was travelling back and forth through the protectorate to establish contacts with the Herero communities, to associate with the leaders of Bechuanaland's political parties, to promote SWAPO's cause in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and to make arrangements for further transport of the refugees. Even SWANU veterans testified that to him all refugees were Namibians and that he never made any distinction between SWAPO and SWANU.⁵⁶ This, however, is contrary to the views of the then SWANU President, Jariretundu Kozonguizi, who pulled Maxton Joseph's reputation in Bechuanaland to pieces. Kozonguizi held the view that

Maxton is the most corrupt official of a political organisation I have come across and what makes it worse, is that he is stupidly so. He is the kind of man who will not hesitate to open a letter addressed to someone else and should there be money, convert it to his own use.⁵⁷

Most probably, it would have been more correct to replace the term "own use" by "use of the party", because there were no signs that Maxton Joseph personally enriched himself. There is little doubt that, although he was helpful to SWANU refugees, he was secretly working against SWANU in order to strengthen SWAPO's position in Bechuanaland. Kozonguizi blamed him for doing exactly that. He made mention of a case that occurred whilst on a mission to the British protectorate in early 1964:

My colleague gave Maxton a letter to post which Maxton opened as soon as we had disappeared. Foolishly enough he sent a copy of the letter to its destination and the original was sent to his office in Dar es Salaam. When we asked him and later Nujoma why he had opened the letter the reply was "because SWAPO was attacked in this letter." One thing I grant them is a strong sense of smell even for the impossible.⁵⁸

Further allegations against Maxton Joseph include the collaboration with the Special Branch of the protectorate. Kozonguizi asserted that Maxton provided the Special Branch with information on Kenneth Abrahams and Mburumba Kerina, who were both SWAPO

⁵⁴ Cf. Interviews with Vitalis Ankama, 21.8.08 and Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

⁵⁵ Interview with Phillemon Kanime, 13.10.08

⁵⁶ Cf. i.a. Interview with Katuutire Kaura, 11.8.08

⁵⁷ Basler Afrika Bibliographien, PA 48, T. Emmett, No. 25, p. 19

⁵⁸ Ibid: p. 20

dissidents at that time.⁵⁹ This also supports the belief that Maxton Joseph was absolutely loyal to SWAPO at any given time during the liberation struggle. Not without good reason, is he one of the few personalities that have received the honour of a gravestone on the Heroes Acre in Windhoek.

When Maxton Joseph arrived in the Bechuanaland Protectorate from Cape Town on 8 July 1961,⁶⁰ he neither had the intention to become the SWAPO representative in the British territory, nor was it SWAPO's plan to install him in this position.⁶¹ But, as Peter Nanyemba, SWAPO's intended appointee in Francistown, moved northwards to become the SWAPO representative in Dar es Salaam,⁶² it was Maxton who was in charge of SWAPO affairs in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. At times, Maxton Joseph was supported by a deputy: between 1963 and 1964 this was Hage Geingob and, afterwards, by Gideon Kasheta, who later succeeded him.⁶³

Maxton Joseph's first destination in the Bechuanaland Protectorate was Maun, where he was granted a temporary permit valid for three months by the District Commissioner of Maun with the consent of the regent of the Batawana, on condition that he would not engage in politics. He immediately visited the Herero areas in Ngamiland, especially Sehitwa, where he established contacts with both the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu and encouraged them to obey the laws of the protectorate,⁶⁴ before his move to live among the Ovaherero in Mahalapye. He shifted his permanent base to Francistown, while maintaining contact with people in Mahalapye and returning there frequently.⁶⁵ In Mahalapye Maxton distributed SWAPO enrolment forms and, as we have seen in chapter 5, this was effective; by the early 1960s the first recruits from Mahalapye went into exile.

The British authorities were well aware of Maxton Joseph's activities. It was evident that he did not adhere to the "no politics" clause. In August 1962 he held a SWAPO awareness meeting in Francistown, which was attended by about 150 people, mainly BPP members. There was no interference from the British side, although by then British officials had come to know Maxton Joseph very well. In early 1962 Maxton was close to being expelled from the protectorate because he had not made any effort to apply for a residence permit in Francistown after the expiry of his temporary permit from Maun. Only after he had officially declared that he wanted to help the SWAPO refugees on their

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*: pp. 19–20

⁶⁰ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/141, 26, Extract of the Central Intelligence Committee Report, January 1962

⁶¹ Cf. Interview with Hidipo Hamutenya, 6.10.08

⁶² Cf. Interview with Theo-Ben Gurirab, 10.9.08

⁶³ Cf. //Gowaseb 2007: pp. 180–183 and Interview with Phillemon Ndeutapo, 23.9.08

⁶⁴ Cf. British National Archives, DO 157/9, 7, Central Intelligence Committee Reports, No. 9, 1961

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 19, No. 11, 1961

way into exile and thus wished to remain permanently and asked for a residence permit, were the threats to expel him dropped.⁶⁶

At that stage there was still little awareness about SWAPO endeavours in the liberation struggle. Maxton Joseph's recruitment attempts were tolerated by the British as long as he did not cause trouble for the territory. In April 1964 the Resident Commissioner in Mafikeng comments:

During the past two months Maxton Joseph has remained in Francistown and has not taken an active part in local political and tribal affairs, although continued to take an interest in SWAPO affairs and has acted as their agent in looking after South West African refugees at present in Francistown [...] [He is] unemployed, but no financial burden on the territory as he is provided with funds by SWAPO [...].⁶⁷

In late August 1962 Maxton Joseph temporarily left the Bechuanaland Protectorate to procure scholarships for SWAPO members. His travels led him to Tanzania, Guinea, Nigeria and the United Arab Republic. On the way back to Bechuanaland, he was arrested in Rhodesia in January 1963 and taken to South Africa, where he was detained for several months. Only on 19 May 1963 was Maxton Joseph allowed to re-enter the Bechuanaland Protectorate.⁶⁸ From then onwards, he intensified his activities in Francistown, aiming primarily to recruit those South West Africans who were temporarily staying in the WENELA camp. Although many SWAPO refugees already made use, as we have seen, of the WENELA system, Maxton continued his attempts from within the WENELA compound to convince further labourers to join SWAPO.⁶⁹ The District Commissioner in Francistown, Philipp Steenkamp, knew about Maxton's activities, but lacked the manpower to suppress activities regarded as being of minor importance.⁷⁰

Maxton Joseph became successful in his attempts to recruit people from both the WENELA compound and the Ovaherero communities in Ngamiland and Mahalapye. He made sure that all SWAPO members who arrived in Francistown were taken to the District Commissioner to be registered. The District Commissioner got to know Maxton fairly well. SWAPO veterans, who passed through Francistown, recall heated debates between the two of them, but, surprisingly, there was always mutual respect.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/141, 26, Extract of Central Intelligence Report, January 1962

⁶⁷ Ibid., 20, Outward Telegram High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13.4.62

⁶⁸ Cf. Ibid., CO 1048/460, 6, BP Central Intelligence Committee Reports, No. 5, 1963

⁶⁹ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Jesaya Nyamu, 25.8.08 and Vitalis Ankama, 21.8.08

⁷⁰ Cf. Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

⁷¹ Cf. Interviews with Solomon Hidinua, 31.8.08, Theo-Ben Gurirab, 10.9.08 and Matthew Shejvali, 5.10.08

Former District Commissioner, Philipp Steenkamp, remembers that Maxton Joseph continuously resisted protectorate initiatives to be sent north.⁷² If we recall (chapter 4) that in terms of the legislation, asylum was only granted in order to protect the refugees, it appears inconsistent Maxton Joseph's activities were tolerated to such an extent. In fact, he was occasionally restricted to the Francistown area,⁷³ but was, most of the time, able to actively facilitate the transport of Namibian refugees through the British protectorate. For this purpose he had also been given a Land Rover from SWAPO.⁷⁴ During Sam Nujoma's visit to Bechuanaland in 1964, he gave the SWAPO president a lift in his vehicle. Returning from recruitment drives in Mahalapye, Maxton Joseph and Sam Nujoma, accompanied by a member of the BIP, had an accident as their car overturned between Mahalapye and Palapye.⁷⁵ They survived the accident unharmed and Maxton Joseph continued his work for SWAPO for another year. In an analysis by the British, in which they considered the situation of those refugees who had applied for a renewal of their residence permits, Maxton was referred to as "the only efficient element in the refugee outfit".⁷⁶ This analysis illustrates that SWAPO representation had already become a permanent fixture in Francistown. The British were aware that if they refused to grant Maxton Joseph a renewal of his residence permit, another SWAPO person would follow in his footsteps. For fear of getting a "worse replacement", Maxton's request was granted.⁷⁷

In May 1965 Maxton Joseph eventually left the Bechuanaland Protectorate. There are some SWAPO veterans who believe SWAPO removed him from his position as representative in Botswana because his manoeuvres in the WENELA compound had become too obvious and this might have consequently endangered his status in the protectorate.⁷⁸ Others regard Maxton Joseph's departure from Bechuanaland simply as a promotion in return for his unfailing works in Francistown and its surroundings.⁷⁹ What is certain though, is that Maxton Joseph went for military training in China after his departure from the British protectorate and became the SWAPO secretary for transport.⁸⁰ In this capacity, Maxton Joseph returned to the borders of Botswana to collect refugees who were waiting for transport.⁸¹ Interestingly, Schleicher alludes to the fact that the structures in exile provided an

⁷² Cf. Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

⁷³ Cf. Interview with Helao Shityuwete, 15.8.08

⁷⁴ Cf. Interview with Simon Kaukungwa, 4.8.08

⁷⁵ Cf. Interviews with Klaas Motshidishi, 21.6.08 and Sam Nujoma, 20.8.08

⁷⁶ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/17, Assistant Secretary to Attorney General and Commissioner of Police, 16.12.64

⁷⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Cf. Interviews with Vitalis Ankama, 21.8.08 and Jesaya Nyamu, 25.8.08

⁷⁹ Cf. Interview with Nangolo Mbumba, 2.10.08

⁸⁰ Cf. Interviews with Hidipo Hamutenya, 6.10.08 and Nangolo Mbumba, 2.10.08

⁸¹ Cf. Interview with Nangolo Mbumba, 2.10.08

ideal matrix for prospective leaders in the ANC.⁸² Although Schleicher referred also to post-apartheid politics, Maxton Joseph's tenure as the SWAPO representative in Francistown can, in this regard, be seen as a school that prepared him for new tasks in the organisation.

It became impossible for him to return to Botswana, as the practice of declaring departing refugees prohibited immigrants had come into action immediately after Maxton Joseph had left the Bechuanaland Protectorate on 5 May 1965.⁸³ Nevertheless, he had taken great advantage of the freedom he had enjoyed while representing SWAPO in Francistown. His activities in the WENELA camp had taken place in a kind of legal borderland, but his organisation certainly benefited from them, as well as from his knowledge of the territory, which he had acquired over the years.

Gideon Kasheta

The departure of Maxton Joseph was, without doubt, a great loss to SWAPO's activities in Botswana. Admittedly, SWAPO's situation in Francistown deteriorated with the advent of independence and, more especially, with the increasing difficulties of smuggling refugees through the WENELA system. Gideon Kasheta, who took over the job as the SWAPO representative in May 1965, never acted with the same force and determination as his predecessor. Kasheta had entered the Bechuanaland Protectorate in October 1962 and, upon his arrival, expressed the wish to proceed to Tanzania in order to receive further education. However, the British authorities quickly realised that he did not make any attempts in this regard.⁸⁴ This illustrates, that in most cases, it was not up to the individual SWAPO members to decide where he or she was sent after arrival in Botswana. Certainly, a few refugees did arrive in Francistown with a clear picture of what their next move would be, be it education or military training. SWAPO, however, had the final say in appointing its members to the respective positions, as in the case of Kasheta. This was no different to other liberation movements. ANC members also heavily relied on the command of their leaders. Schleicher calls this the "culture of dependency."⁸⁵

As a representative, Gideon Kasheta did not engage in any dangerous recruitment attempts. He focused on maintaining communication with the SWAPO office in

⁸² Cf. Schleicher 2004: p. 61. It has to be mentioned that Schleicher was not only referring to leading positions in the liberation struggle, but also to government positions in independent South Africa. In the case of Maxton Joseph one can, however, argue that he became a member of parliament after Namibian independence.

⁸³ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/17, Savingram from Minister of Home Affairs to High Commissioner's Office, 5.5.65

⁸⁴ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to Senior Permanent Secretary, Office of the President, 19.6.67

⁸⁵ Schleicher 2004: p. 49

Dar es Salaam, with which he was in frequent contact, informing them about the latest refugee movements and, most importantly, about the facilitation of the refugee traffic. In their analysis, even the British came to the conclusion that Kasheta was “not of the same calibre as Maxton Joseph.”⁸⁶ He was, though, able to build on the structures Maxton had left behind and benefited from his experiences as his deputy. In one instance, however, Gideon Kasheta came into conflict with the authorities when he tried to boost SWAPO’s image in the protectorate. In 1965 Kasheta tried to inflate the importance of SWAPO in Bechuanaland to receive additional funds from welfare organisations by falsely recording members of the Angolan UPA (União dos Povos de Angola, at that stage known as FNLA) as SWAPO members. He later admitted that he had tried to deceive the British authorities and was consequently fined R10 for making a false statement.⁸⁷

Apart from that, Gideon Kasheta did not attract much attention. He had to deal with the growing awareness among WENELA officials that their transport system was taken advantage of by prospective freedom fighters. He reacted by advising new SWAPO arrivals to first go to South Africa and join up after having worked in the mines, or to seek temporary refuge in Mahalapye where he had good contacts.⁸⁸ On 22 February 1968 Gideon Kasheta departed for Zambia by air.⁸⁹ This was a mode of travelling which was progressively made use of by SWAPO with increasing financial opportunities. Refugees were often airlifted to Zambia, especially from Kasane.⁹⁰

Luckeyel Baki “Lucky” Shoopala

As in the case of Gideon Kasheta, Lucky Shoopala had been in Botswana for some time before he became the SWAPO representative in Francistown after Kasheta’s departure. He first came through Botswana in 1962 but, at that time, Botswana was just a transit station for him. On his way into exile, he had been detained in Rhodesia before returning to South West Africa.⁹¹ He then became the secretary of the SWAPO branch in Okatana in the present-day Oshana region and entered Botswana again shortly before independence on 6 June 1966. On reporting to the authorities, he stated his aim was to go to

⁸⁶ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/17, Assistant-Secretary to Attorney-General and Commissioner of Police, 16.12.64

⁸⁷ Cf. Ibid., OP 55/32, Letter to the Office of the High Commissioner, 25.3.65

⁸⁸ Cf. Interviews with Nestor Embumbulu, 25.8.08 and Samson Ndeikwila, 29.8.08

⁸⁹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to Senior Permanent Secretary, Office of the President, 6.3.68

⁹⁰ Cf. Ibid., OP 27/56, Botswana High Commission, Lusaka to Secretary of External Affairs, 5.5.76

⁹¹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/26, Minutes of the Francistown Refugee Advisory Committee meeting, 3.5.68

Dar es Salaam where he intended to study law.⁹² Once again, this gives us an indication of the limited freedom of choice open to SWAPO members when they left for exile and also of the “culture of dependency”. Lucky Shoopala was designated to represent the organisation in Botswana and could thus not pursue his objective of further education.

Shortly after his arrival in Botswana, Lucky Shoopala was involved in a fight, when he tried to stab a fellow Namibian with a knife.⁹³ Detailed facts are not established about this incident but, as Vitalis Ankama mentioned, as Lucky Shoopala was at one stage sentenced to being “blown with a cane”,⁹⁴ it seems probable that this was a result of his attack. Consequently, Shoopala did not have the best reputation with the local authorities. This did not change after he presented himself before the newly established Refugee Advisory Committee in Francistown, where committee members imputed a “lack of frankness and helpfulness” to him.⁹⁵

This was not an ideal basis for Shoopala’s work on behalf of SWAPO, although he was in Francistown during a time when the flow of refugees into Botswana was low. Hence, it was Shoopala’s main task, besides teaching English to his fellow SWAPO members, to stay in contact with the SWAPO headquarters in exile, which had then moved to Lusaka.⁹⁶ Furthermore, he was the spokesperson for all SWAPO refugees and, if certain refugees faced expulsion from Botswana, he would advocate their exceptional leave to remain by arguing that further transport would be organised by SWAPO.⁹⁷ It seemed, however, as if Shoopala was not as well supported by SWAPO as his predecessors. He received his support from the Botswana Council of Churches (BCoC),⁹⁸ whereas Maxton Joseph and Gideon Kasheta had been sustained by SWAPO funds. There is much to be said for the presumption that SWAPO simply exploited the increasing presence of welfare organisations in Francistown. It probably did not see why it should support its representative when he qualified for an allowance from the BCoC. Hence, the Commissioner of Police complained about Shoopala’s unscrupulousness in being “fully prepared to live on charity.”⁹⁹

Lucky Shoopala was not so occupied with SWAPO affairs that he could not spend time on other business. He set up a small hawking business in second-hand clothing to earn

⁹² Cf. Ibid., OP 55/36, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary to the President, 1.8.69

⁹³ Cf. Ibid.

⁹⁴ Cf. Interview with Vitalis Ankama, 21.8.08

⁹⁵ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/26, Minutes of the Francistown Refugee Advisory Committee Meeting, 3.5.68

⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid., OP 55/36, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary to the President, 1.8.69

⁹⁷ Cf. Ibid., OP 27/1, Lucky Tshoopara to Office of the President, 14.10.71

⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid., OP 27/1, Marsh (BCC) to Hamdani, 9.5.71

⁹⁹ Cf. Ibid., OP 55/36, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary to the President, 1.8.69

some additional money and was also sighted in other areas of Botswana, where he was not involved in SWAPO businesses.¹⁰⁰ Sam Nujoma concluded that Shoopala lacked the necessary seriousness that was needed in the liberation struggle. In retrospect, Nujoma believes that Lucky Shoopala

didn't really have a vision of what the struggle was about, because the struggle required determination. But he wasn't prepared to face sufferings.¹⁰¹

This judgement should be considered in light of the allegations, which were brought against Shoopala that eventually landed him in prison in Zambia. In the beginning of the 1970s, SWAPO refugees passing through Francistown suspected Lucky Shoopala of not only misusing SWAPO funds, but also of collaborating with South Africa. The circumstances of this allegation remain unclear. While Fredrick Matongo talks about "connections with the enemy",¹⁰² Sacky Amunyela asserts there was some kind of co-operation "with the South African intelligence."¹⁰³

The accusation of spying for South Africa was not uncommon during the Namibian liberation struggle. In many instances, it has been alleged SWAPO used this allegation to rid themselves of internal adversaries. The best known of these instances is the expulsion of Andreas Shipanga.¹⁰⁴ In the case of Lucky Shoopala it is unclear in what way he could have been a potential danger to SWAPO. Nonetheless, as the exile leadership was informed of this by SWAPO refugees in Botswana, a group of SWAPO representatives, under the leadership of Moses Garoeb (a member of the SWAPO Central Committee since the Consultative Congress in Tanga in 1969), came to Botswana in 1973 to investigate the case. Moses Garoeb's group obtained information on Shoopala's behaviour solely from those SWAPO refugees that had accused him of collaboration with South Africa. Garoeb then decided not only to move the remaining SWAPO refugees in Francistown (for further transport to Lusaka), but to remove Shoopala from his post and send him to Lusaka as well. The group left Botswana on 9 August 1973. Lucky Shoopala was put into prison in Lusaka, where he remained until 1976; SWAPO thereafter lacked a representative in Francistown.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ibid., OP 27/1, Marsh (BCC) to Hamdani, 9.5.71 and Interview with Lazarus Hamutele, 17.9.08

¹⁰¹ Interview with Sam Nujoma, 20.8.08

¹⁰² Interview with Fredrick Matongo, 16.9.08

¹⁰³ Interview with Sacky Amunyela, 18.9.08

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Cooper 2001: p. 283

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Interview with Lazarus Hamutele, 17.9.08 and Botswana National Archives, OP 27/2, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary to the President, 22.8.73

SWAPO representatives in Botswana up until Namibian independence

The vacancy created by Lucky Shoopala's sudden departure was not filled immediately. However, when the influx of refugees had gained momentum in 1974/75, Zacky Hauwanga was appointed as the new SWAPO representative,¹⁰⁶ although the importance of this position declined due to the fact that the large majority of SWAPO members no longer used Botswana as a transit station. Zacky Hauwanga had been one of the student heads at Kurasini International College, which was the Tanzanian equivalent to Nkumbi (another school of the Afro-American Institute).¹⁰⁷ Even Namibian political opponents attested to his "very mature understanding"¹⁰⁸ of the liberation struggle. He was in close contact with SWANU refugees, who accounted for the majority of Namibian refugees in Botswana from 1975 onwards. In order to facilitate the onward movement of SWAPO refugees, he visited Ngamiland and Kasane to ensure his people could proceed.¹⁰⁹ Under him the representation of SWAPO became an official office.

Zacky Hauwanga remained in Botswana until 1978. Andrew Nghidinwa, who had been working for SWAPO in Lubango in southern Angola, then took over. He shifted

the SWAPO office temporarily to Gaborone in order to be closer to the government and to the UN institutions. The Botswana government was not in favour of this shift and security considerations also argued against it.¹¹⁰ Andrew Nghidinwa was succeeded by Leonard Iipumbu, who had been in exile with SWAPO, occupying various positions since 1974. It was clear that during the 1980s the SWAPO representatives were mainly concerned with advocating SWAPO's cause in Botswana. SWAPO's exile politics prevailed in Tanzania, Zambia and Angola, whereas the office in Botswana served mainly as a communication platform and as a link to the Botswana government. Leonard Iipumbu even had the time to take up studies at the University of Botswana, sponsored by the United Nations High Com-



Fig. 23: Andrew Nghidinwa in the SWAPO offices, Francistown 1979

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Interview with Lazarus Hamutele, 17.9.08

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Interview with Haimbodi ya Nambinga-Kati, 12.9.08

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Festus Tjikua, 25.9.08

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Interview with Steve Motinga, 1.10.08

¹¹⁰ Cf. Interviews with Andrew Nghidinwa, 25.4.09 and Leonard Iipumbu, 15.9.08

missioner for Refugees. He left Francistown in 1987. Wibald Sheepo acted as SWAPO's last representative in Francistown up until independence.¹¹¹

SWAPO: Active on Botswana's territory

Botswana's proximity to South West Africa and her role as a corridor for refugees and freedom fighters providing an initial escape route, inevitably led to SWAPO becoming active on her territory. Nujoma's organisation was aware of the restrictions they faced in Bechuanaland and Botswana respectively, as far as political agitation was concerned. Nevertheless, as the following sections reveal, SWAPO's attempts to organise logistics and communication in Botswana were successful to a certain extent. At the same time, they created difficulties for the authorities in the territory of Namibia's eastern neighbour.

Organisation from Botswana

Strategically, the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana respectively provided an important location for SWAPO's endeavours in the liberation struggle. Although it was understood that the territory was not going to be used for military infiltration into the home country,¹¹² it was, as has already become apparent in the case of SWANU, an ideal place for establishing contacts with the home front, or for exerting influence on Namibian refugees who had not taken sides with one of the liberation movements. As we have realised, the longer the liberation struggle lasted, the more difficult it became for freedom fighters to re-enter Botswana. On several occasions SWAPO members failed to gain access to the country because they had already been declared prohibited immigrants.

Earlier on in the struggle, SWAPO took advantage of the relative freedom of action (or rather the lack of immigration controls in the Bechuanaland Protectorate) its activists enjoyed in the British territory. We recall that the SWANU president visited the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1964. SWAPO president, Sam Nujoma, entered the protectorate in that year. He entered by train from Rhodesia arriving in Bechuanaland on 29 February 1964.¹¹³ It was his first visit since he had passed through Bechuanaland in 1960. He was joined by Emil Appolus and Jacob Kuhangwa, who arrived in early March.¹¹⁴ The British authorities quickly established that the three SWAPO officials had come to the protectorate to facilitate the movement of SWAPO refugees through Be-

¹¹¹ Cf. Interview with Leonard Iipumbu, 15.9.08

¹¹² There were considerations arising out of this that will be picked out as a theme in the fourth subsection of this chapter (p. 175 ff.).

¹¹³ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/460, 20, Bechuanaland Intelligence Report, No. 3, 1964

¹¹⁴ Cf. Ibid.

chuanaland.¹¹⁵ The fact that they had arrived from a country where they were not under threat made the British feel less responsible, as in their case protection was not necessary.

Protectorate authorities tried to remove the three immigrants, who had evidently entered Bechuanaland for the purpose of political agitation. The Secretary of State for the Colonies recommended that refusal of entry for Nujoma, Appolus and Kuhangua was possible on the grounds that they would not be sent to a country where they faced detention.¹¹⁶ After assurances that they could leave freely via Northern Rhodesia, the three left the Bechuanaland Protectorate on 31 March and were declared prohibited immigrants after their departure.¹¹⁷

Shortly before his departure, Sam Nujoma was interviewed by District Commissioner Steenkamp in Francistown. Steenkamp wanted to find out SWAPO's intentions for the Namibian refugees, who were passing through the protectorate. Nujoma explained that SWAPO lacked financial means and concrete arrangements for the onward transportation of refugees but that it was, of course, SWAPO's intention to allow them to proceed further north.¹¹⁸ However, the District Commissioner did not seem convinced that the presence of Nujoma, Kuhangua and Appolus would contribute towards more effective processing of the refugees and, as their stay was unnecessary on humanitarian grounds, their forced departure seemed logical.

The three SWAPO officials did manage to get a picture of what was happening in Francistown, in the White House and in the WENELA compound and held discussions with Maxton Joseph. Possibly as a result of these discussions, Maxton intensified his endeavours to recruit Namibians from the WENELA camp. At the beginning of 1964, SWAPO had plans for a military struggle and it was clearly necessary to accelerate recruitment in Botswana.¹¹⁹

During his month-long stay, Sam Nujoma visited the Herero community in Mahalapye and was thereby also supported by party members of BIP and BPP.¹²⁰ Nujoma's visit to Mahalapye certainly made an impact, for the Ovaherero from Mahalapye continued to volunteer to join SWAPO and PLAN. Both Nujoma's and Kozonguizi's visits to Bechuanaland in 1964 parallel the endeavours of the ANC in exile. The ANC held its first consultative conference in exile in Lobatse in southern Botswana in 1962.¹²¹ Although

¹¹⁵ Cf. Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 126 A/B, Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner, 26.3.64

¹¹⁷ Cf. Ibid., CO 1048/460, 21, Bechuanaland Intelligence Report, No.4, 1964

¹¹⁸ Cf. Ibid., CO 1048/343, 130–131 High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31.3.64

¹¹⁹ Cf. Interviews with Hidipo Hamutenya, 6.10.08 and Nickey Iyambo, 7.10.08

¹²⁰ Cf. Interview with Klaas Motshidisi, 21.6.08

¹²¹ Cf. Ellis/Sechaba 1992: pp. 34–35

the activities of SWAPO and SWANU in Botswana did not approach anything that could be termed a “consultative congress”, these activities were only tolerated in the early 1960s during colonial times. Although Nujoma’s and Kozonguizi’s missions as well as the Lobatse Conference concerned the issue of the armed struggle and was thus potentially a “hot” topic, the British gave the liberation movements the go-ahead. A few years later, however, both SWAPO and the ANC were forced to hold their conferences in Tanzania, in Tanga and Morogoro respectively.

Despite having been *persona non grata* in Botswana since 1964, Sam Nujoma made another attempt to enter the country in 1969, this time using official channels. Nujoma approached the High Commission of Botswana in Lusaka in April 1969 and asked for permission to enter Botswana. He motivated his application by referring to the Herero communities:

The visit will be to exhort Herero people to obey the laws of Botswana, especially because some of them are citizens of Botswana.¹²²

At first sight this rationale did not seem credible and the Botswana authorities dismissed Nujoma’s claim. Firstly, there was no reason to tell any citizen of Botswana that he or she should abide by the laws of their country, as it was self-evident that the law should not be broken. More importantly, Gaborone realised that the Namibian liberation struggle had intensified, and thus Nujoma’s intended visit could only be linked to SWAPO’s freedom fight. The High Commissioner in Lusaka clearly pronounced that Nujoma’s statement posed a

childish reason. It’s an excuse to get to Botswana. He [i.e. Nujoma] is a freedom fighter and definitely there will be a serious motive!¹²³

The High Commission in Lusaka did not make any efforts to investigate the motives behind Sam Nujoma’s plan to come to Botswana, and thus one can only speculate about his intention. In 1969 there were very few SWAPO refugees in Francistown, and it is therefore unlikely that Nujoma wanted to facilitate refugee movements up north. It is probable that he wanted to visit the Ovaherero communities for a different purpose. During those years, a new generation of SWAPO supporters among the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu had started to develop (see chapter 5) and it would have been worthwhile for SWAPO to have its president available to inspire potential recruits and thus heighten the recruitment process.

There are, however, two details about this intended visit that deserve particular attention. Firstly, it is remarkable that the authorities of Botswana had lost any naivety that

¹²² Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Botswana High Commission to Office of the President, 15.4.69

¹²³ Ibid.

might have been there in the first years after independence, or during colonial rule. The government in Gaborone had no illusion about the military activities of SWAPO and it was clear that to avoid any trouble even the president of SWAPO himself could not be allowed into the territory. Before independence the Commissioner of Police had declared:

I don't think that SWAPO leaders are moderate and well disposed. In the interests of security I consider it my duty to advise that those who left voluntarily for countries for the north should not be allowed to return and "operate" in this territory.¹²⁴

This illustrates that certain reservations about SWAPO were already present in the dying days of the British protectorate. The increasing refugee traffic from South West Africa generated a feeling of insecurity among Botswana's authorities. They well realised that by granting refugees free passage through their country, they were indirectly contributing to the freedom fighters' taking up arms eventually. Archibald Mogwe, at that time Secretary for External Affairs, observed in 1967 that:

it is becoming increasingly clear that a large proportion of the refugees from South West Africa professing to be proceeding north to further their education are merely going to be trained as saboteurs or terrorists and return to South West Africa. [...] Botswana has no wish to assist in the use of force against neighbouring countries [...] those are inevitably harming the interests here of the genuine political refugees [...]¹²⁵

From this statement we may derive that the understanding of the government in Gaborone was guided by the legislation that defined a genuine political refugee – and only those were accepted in Botswana – as one who had simply fled his country because he was persecuted politically. On the other hand, Mogwe's findings reflect the realistic perception Gaborone held shortly after having been granted independence, namely, that a large number of the refugees intended to physically fight for independence. Policy statements on foreign policy issues later explicitly emphasized, that, although Botswana was strictly against any military activities on her territory, she did recognise the armed struggle as being legitimate because she was not in a position to offer alternatives.¹²⁶ Secondly, it is important to note that when SWAPO's representative in Dar es Salaam, Peter Nanyemba, tried to enter Botswana in 1965,¹²⁷ no attempt was made to clandestinely sneak into Botswana. Instead, the respective authorities were approached, thus voluntarily disclosing the intention to visit. This is an indication that it was becoming more difficult to enter

¹²⁴ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs, 7.12.65

¹²⁵ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/60, AM Mogwe to Mburumba Kerina, 7.2.67

¹²⁶ Cf. Polhelmus 1985: p. 262 f.

¹²⁷ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs, 19.11.65

Botswana without being detected. Sam Nujoma, especially, was a well-known figure in Africa by 1969. If he had tried clandestinely to visit Botswana in 1969, he might have encountered difficulties in moving about. By using diplomatic channels, SWAPO could demonstrate its openness towards the Botswana government.

Nujoma could not just assume that Gaborone would grant him permission to visit. SWAPO could rely on organisers, both in Ngamiland and in Mahalapye who made the organisation known among the Herero communities, so that Nujoma's presence was not all that necessary. There was constant communication between the external wing of SWAPO and its representative in Francistown. After Nujoma's, Kuhangua's and Appolus' departure, SWAPO never focused strongly on Botswana. In comparison to SWANU, it did not lack alternatives and made use of other centres of activity and channels of communication.

Problems created by the presence of freedom fighters and refugees

The presence of refugees was, of course, linked to a number of social problems, especially in Francistown. Some of these problems have previously been alluded to. Many refugees produced offspring whilst in exile, especially those staying for longer periods of time thereby enlarging the refugee community. Among the SWAPO representatives, Lucky Shoopala had four children from a fiancée in Francistown.¹²⁸ Maxton Joseph became a father during his stay in the Bechuanaland Protectorate.¹²⁹ This was not appreciated by the authorities, as additional refugees had to be looked after. Philipp Steenkamp, having got to know Maxton Joseph fairly well, was not amused when he heard that the SWAPO representative had impregnated a woman. The maintenance of the child could not be assured, especially during the time when support from aid agencies was still low.¹³⁰

These were, however, minor problems compared to occasional violations of Botswana's policy of not allowing any military activity on her territory. Before the frequent border raids by Rhodesian forces started in the 1970s, the most apparent violation of the "no violence clause" had been the reaction to the so-called "Wankie campaign". After this event, combined ANC and ZAPU forces had been forced to withdraw into Botswana and were consequently arrested for carrying arms on the territory of Botswana. This was, as has been outlined before, regarded as a violation of Botswana's principles. SWAPO understood that the infiltration of its cadres through Bechuanaland or Botswana, respectively, would not be tolerated and could pose unnecessary risks. Nonetheless, armed SWAPO fighters were detected on Botswana territory on two occasions during the 1960s.

¹²⁸ Cf. Interview with Lucky Shoopala, 2.9.08

¹²⁹ Cf. Interview with Klaas Morshidisi, 21.6.08

¹³⁰ Cf. Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

On 28 February 1967, a group of eight heavily-armed SWAPO guerrilla fighters was spotted by a Botswana Police Patrol in Ngamiland about twelve miles south of Shakawe. Seven fighters escaped but the police arrested the eighth one and secured the fighters' ammunition that had been left behind. It included eight Chinese automatic rifles, two Bren Guns, over two hundred rounds of ammunition, medical supplies and haversacks containing documents relating to SWAPO and notebooks containing guerrilla and sabotage instructional notes. The documents identified one member of the group as Moses Nganate, who came originally from Mahalapye and who had been recruited by Maxton Joseph in 1962.¹³¹ The fact that these SWAPO guerrilla fighters had managed to reach this far into the interior argues for the fighters' deliberate crossing of the border. This must have been an attempt to use an alternative route to infiltrate back into Namibia that was more accessible than through the heavily patrolled Caprivi Strip. There is no indication that other SWAPO fighters tried to return through Botswana; possibly they were deterred by the presence of the Botswana Police, which had detected this group in 1967.

In 1969 a group of three PLAN fighters were arrested on Botswana territory. This time the case was different. These three PLAN fighters had been part of a group of seven guerrilla fighters that had clashed with a unit of the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF) in the Kavango region on Christmas Day 1969. Four members were killed, while the other three simply looked for the easiest escape route, which was across the border into northern Ngamiland.¹³² One of the three PLAN members of the group, Fredrick Matongo, recalls his memories of the flight into Botswana:

We were in a very deteriorating situation because we had no food, we didn't have enough ammunition to continue fighting. We were also in a small number. We were forced to fight whether we liked it or not. We could not go deep inside the country [i.e. Namibia] because they were already alerted in that area that there was that movement. So the only area where we could go to was Botswana.¹³³

The three PLAN fighters were soon detected by the Botswana Police, arrested for carrying arms illegally and consequently detained in Francistown. Fredrick Matongo had, however, hidden his gun and, as he refused to admit that he had been in possession of a gun, he was treated extremely roughly by the police. Matongo reports about his sufferings:

Now the policeman came, clapping me, beating me. They took me to a small house and detained me and then they put a bucket of seeds on my head.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to the Permanent Secretary to the President, 28.2.67

¹³² Cf. Interview with Fredrick Matongo, 16.9.08

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

At that stage, Matongo and his two colleagues were exposed to the arbitrariness of the police officials. A normal punishment for illegal possession of arms was five years imprisonment, but after consultations with SWAPO in Lusaka and with the Zambian government, the three detained fighters were released in the middle of January 1970 and allowed back into Zambia.¹³⁵

The treatment of Matongo gave SWAPO a clear indication of what PLAN fighters could expect, if they misused the territory of Botswana. It supported the long-established policy of SWAPO not to infiltrate any fighters through the territory of Namibia's eastern neighbour. Yet, Gaborone showed a co-operative attitude by working out an arrangement for the Namibian freedom fighters to leave Botswana without having to fear reprisals in their home country. One cannot assume that the brutal treatment Matongo experienced in Francistown was ordered by the Botswana government, but was rather the individual misconduct of members of the Botswana Police who, surprisingly, did not show any signs of solidarity.

A training camp in Botswana: A brief illusion

Just as SWANU refugees had received some spontaneous, mainly theoretical, military training especially in Dukwe, SWAPO members too underwent some "light" instruction on guerrilla tactics. Nestor Embumbulu mentions illegal training at night during a temporary stay, while awaiting permission to enter Zambia in Kazungula in 1966. This was conducted by Jeppe Jacko from the South African PAC, but admits that this was done without guns.¹³⁶ Thus it was not much more than a pastime.

There were, however, plans for a SWAPO base in Botswana, which was possibly intended for the purpose of military training. These plans were closely connected to Patrick Duncan. Duncan was a South African liberal, who became one of the few white members of the PAC. As editor of the liberal newspaper, *Contact*, he strongly condemned apartheid.¹³⁷ Having been based in Cape Town, Patrick Duncan had made contacts among the contract workers from Ovamboland who then went on to form the OPC and OPO.¹³⁸ Due to his political activities in South Africa, Patrick Duncan had been refused an exit permit and was thus obliged to leave the country illegally, when he went on a familiarisation trip

¹³⁵ Cf. Ibid. and Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, G.C. Motlasedi to SWAPO Secretariat, Lusaka, 12.1.70

¹³⁶ Cf. Interview with Nestor Embumbulu, 25.8.08

¹³⁷ Cf. Driver 1980: Preface

¹³⁸ Cf. Ibid.: pp. 198–199

to Bechuanaland in May 1961, where he visited Serowe and Maun.¹³⁹ Patrick Duncan believed that it was of strategic importance for SWAPO to have a base in north-western Bechuanaland from where Nujoma's organisation could operate. He thought of establishing a "SWA action station" or "refugee reception point inside Bechuanaland".¹⁴⁰

Duncan's plans never progressed beyond the initial stage. He tried to raise money from associates in South Africa and the United States, but his requests were turned down.¹⁴¹ While his biographer believes that Patrick Duncan made investigations in Bechuanaland exclusively for the benefit of SWAPO, his close friend, Randolph Vigne, suggests that Duncan's idea had to be seen in a broader context of supporting southern African liberation movements, particularly from South Africa. Vigne reports:

My recollection is that he intended a wider purpose for it, mainly as a base for mobilising resistance in South Africa itself. But it never got beyond the earliest planning stage. Duncan was enthusiastically pro-SWAPO and was very popular with the SWAPO leadership and would undoubtedly have used such a base in their support, though this would have been a secondary use for it.¹⁴²

Despite his good relationship with the SWAPO leadership, there is no evidence that Patrick Duncan ever approached SWAPO party leaders with his intention. This indeed speaks in favour of Randolph Vigne's recollections that Duncan planned a base, which was not solely intended for SWAPO's activities.

The British protectorate was aware that Patrick Duncan was helping Maxton Joseph, as the SWAPO representative, with funds and that he frequently visited Bechuanaland between 1961 and 1963.¹⁴³ During one of his visits, Duncan allegedly made enquiries about purchasing property in the British territory but, since these enquiries concerned property in eastern and southern Botswana,¹⁴⁴ it is likely that this was meant for the use of South African freedom fighters. In any case, Patrick Duncan had aroused suspicion about his activities in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and was ultimately declared a prohibited immigrant in late May 1963.¹⁴⁵ Some commentators attributed this move of the Bechuanaland Protectorate Executive Council as a move to please Pretoria, because clearly Patrick Duncan as an active white member of the PAC, elicited strong protest from the

¹³⁹ Cf. British National Archives, DO 157/9, 13, Central Intelligence Committee Reports, No. 6, 1961

¹⁴⁰ Driver 1980: pp. 199–200

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*: p. 199

¹⁴² E-mail from Randolph Vigne to the author, 16.8.08

¹⁴³ Cf. British National Archives, DO 157/9, 7–19, Central Intelligence Committee Reports 1961 and CO 1048/141, 20, Outward Telegram High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13.4.62

¹⁴⁴ Cf. British National Archives, DO 157/9, 19, Central Intelligence Committee Report, No. 11, 1961

¹⁴⁵ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/460, 6, Bechuanaland Intelligence Committee Reports, May 1963

Verwoerd government.¹⁴⁶ It was at that stage that plans for any SWAPO activities on a larger scale in Botswana had to be abolished. Duncan's radical plans for the achievement of racial equality never seemed to have been a serious factor in SWAPO's considerations.

SWAPO's relations with SWANU in Botswana

The rivalry between the different liberation movements in southern Africa has been exposed in various works on the liberation movements. The antagonism between SWAPO and SWANU remained within reasonable bounds, because SWAPO soon emerged as *the* strong force from South West Africa, unlike the situation in other southern African territories, namely Zimbabwe and Angola, where there were two or more liberation movements, which resorted to armed struggle and hence also fought each other. Yet, from the many statements made by Namibian freedom fighters, particularly from the SWAPO side, one gets the impression that the relationship between the two factions of the Namibian liberation struggle in exile was not always characterised by mutual trust and respect.

In Botswana, however, the situation was different, especially during the 1960s. When South West Africans left their home country and fled via Bechuanaland they had not been influenced by any outside propaganda from SWAPO's or SWANU's external leadership. Efforts towards a common front between SWAPO and SWANU had been much stronger in Namibia than abroad,¹⁴⁷ where the liberation movements were exposed to various outside influences such as the Sino-Soviet Split and the Cold War.¹⁴⁸ Fresh arrivals in Bechuanaland were therefore open to the respective liberation movements and free of any reservations. Accordingly, both SWAPO and SWANU veterans assert that relations between each other were decent and without much antagonism.¹⁴⁹ Even in 1975, the Botswana authorities noted that there was "frequent intercourse on a social level" between SWANU and SWAPO members in Botswana.¹⁵⁰

Admittedly, these comments do not necessarily reflect what happened underground, as has been demonstrated by the controversial opening of the SWANU letter by Maxton Joseph in 1964. Yet, as we have seen, the SWAPO representatives in Francistown catered for SWANU refugees as well, as did SWANU's Daniel Munamava in Maun. Combined refugee transport was arranged to enable everyone to proceed.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 325

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Larkin 1971: pp. 188–189

¹⁴⁹ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Peter Katjavivi, 20.7.07, Phillemon Ndeutapo, 23.9.08 and Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

¹⁵⁰ Botswana National Archives, OP 27/46, Botswana High Commissioner to Lusaka to Secretary for External Affairs, 9.10.75

However, the situation changed when outside influences became more important and awareness of these grew among the refugee community in Botswana. The SWANU refugees, who entered Botswana in large numbers from 1975 onwards, realised that their counterparts from SWAPO were processed faster than they were. Naturally resentment grew within the SWANU refugee community, especially after Ngavirue's talks to join forces with SWAPO had failed (see chapter 6, p. 144 ff.).

In the 1970s SWAPO and SWANU grew apart: SWAPO was intensifying its guerrilla activities, whereas SWANU languished due to its international isolation. Many SWANU members still claimed that their organisation featured ideological purity, but the recognition of SWAPO as the "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people" in 1976 closed all doors for SWANU. The only possibility now for SWANU members to actively get involved in the liberation struggle was to join SWAPO. Although there were contacts on a social level, tensions grew among the SWAPO and SWANU refugees in Botswana, and SWAPO's policy towards accepting SWANU members was not clear-cut. Zed Ngavirue's approach had shown that SWAPO would only accept individual members of SWANU, not whole units of trained fighters or refugees who wanted to remain independent from PLAN. However, high-ranking SWAPO officials were even critical of the former. In a discussion with the Botswana High Commissioner in Lusaka, Moses Garoeb dismissed the possibility of SWAPO receiving any SWANU dissidents. The High Commissioner wrote:

Garoeb suggested that SWANU members are either puppets of Pretoria or simply politically inactive. They would go to Botswana masquerading as refugees and sometimes even as SWAPO members only to leave the party afterwards when SWAPO had taken pains to clear them and arranged safe passage for them to Zambia at its expense.¹⁵¹

Indeed, it had happened on occasion that SWANU members, with the consent of SWAPO, pretended to belong to SWAPO in order to be admitted to Zambia, which did not accept freedom fighters from non-recognised liberation movements. In Botswana, though, the SWAPO representatives thought in more practical terms. Any recruited member, even if he had been a SWANU member before, could help the cause of the struggle. While the Botswana High Commission in Lusaka confirmed that some of the SWAPO leaders in Zambia were advocating the recruitment of stranded SWANU members in Botswana,¹⁵² the SWAPO representatives in Francistown, above all Zacky Hauwanga, continuously

¹⁵¹ Botswana National Archives, OP 27/46, Botswana High Commissioner, Lusaka to Secretary for External Affairs, 9.10.75

¹⁵² Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 27/46, Botswana High Commission, Lusaka to Permanent Secretary to the President, 11.6.76

approached SWANU members to lure them away from their organisation by highlighting the benefits a freedom fighter would enjoy as a SWAPO member. Indeed, these benefits were self-evident. SWAPO was the recognised movement and, as such, membership of Namibia's then "sole and authentic representative" would have brought about the chance of easy transfer through Zambia. Furthermore, both military training and further education would have come into reach.

These recruitment attempts were very informal. In many instances, the SWAPO representative would just invite a SWANU guy for a beer and then he would present the options SWAPO was offering. Eddie Tjirare, who resisted Zacky Hauwanga's efforts, estimates that about 20 % of the SWANU members in Botswana eventually decided to join SWAPO.¹⁵³ Another SWANU veteran, Festus Tjikua, recalls that it became kind of a game between the two liberation movements to try and recruit people from the other side. He explains that

SWANU would try exactly the same. If we saw a SWAPO guy we would say: Look, SWAPO doesn't have ideological clarity, join SWANU which is more socialist or Marxist. That kind of game we would play. SWAPO would say we have the liberation struggle, we have a gun.¹⁵⁴

Evidently by that stage it proved virtually impossible to convince anybody simply by the force of a more precise ideology. After all SWANU had been trapped in its ideological convictions and no theoretical approach could compensate for the relative practical success of SWAPO's military campaign or its diplomatic efforts, which had become known in the SWANU refugee community in Botswana.

As we have come to understand, opportunism was often the motive behind the attempts to escape of many Namibians, and it is therefore not surprising that some SWANU members succumbed to SWAPO's enticement. However, there is no evidence that these SWANU members ever played an important role in the remaining years of the liberation struggle and there are even allegations that some of these former SWANU members, who were recruited in Botswana, were thrown into the SWAPO dungeons in Lubango.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

Due to the fact that SWAPO refugees entered Botswana through different routes, they basically made use of the whole territory. As expected, the main movements of SWAPO refugees took place between 1960 and 1966. However, there were still SWAPO mem-

¹⁵³ Cf. Interview with Eddie Tjirare, 23.8.08

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Festus Tjikua, 25.9.08

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Interview with Willem Karamatha, 23.9.08

bers who came to Botswana, when the “second wave” began. They were usually “processed” quite quickly and did not spend much time in Botswana. The central location of SWAPO’s activities was Francistown, where SWAPO’s representation was soon recognised after Maxton Joseph had declared that he would remain in the Bechuanaland Protectorate permanently. SWAPO policy aimed at replacing the representatives every couple of years and it was only after the sudden dismissal of Lucky Shoopala that a short vacancy occurred. Although Maxton Joseph played a very prominent role, Francistown was never an important external base as were SWAPO’s offices in Dar es Salaam, Lusaka or later in Angola.

Nevertheless, in terms of recruitment, Francistown emerged as an ideal base because of the use of the WENELA transport system, and the huge compound for the housing of mineworkers. Despite Kozonguizi’s statement, it certainly was not *the* crucial difference between SWAPO and SWANU, but it undoubtedly helped SWAPO to provide sufficient manpower for PLAN, when the military wing was established. When making use of the WENELA transport system, many SWAPO refugees were prepared to undergo the most humiliating treatment in order to pursue their goal of leaving Namibia. It is surely ironic that the WENELA system, for many years the embodiment of injustice, exploitation and debasement, became such an efficient tool for activists against these moral wrongs.

When escaping from the WENELA camp, SWAPO members benefited from the lax handling of these occurrences by the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Especially during colonial times, SWAPO got away with a lot of political activity. For the British, Maxton Joseph’s activities were evident, yet he was hardly restricted in these. The “no-politics clause” was simply not enforced. Even Sam Nujoma was able to move around the protectorate for one month in 1964 before he was ordered to leave. Admittedly, however, this was also possible for Jariretundu Kozonguizi in the same year who, at that stage, was probably as well known in Bechuanaland as Nujoma. Interestingly, with the rising awareness of the Namibian liberation struggle, SWAPO leaders were more restricted and procedures between the party executive and the government of Botswana became more formal. As the SWAPO refugee traffic through Botswana decreased, the organisation did not have to bother too much about hardening conditions in Botswana.

The slightly stricter handling of the issue of the Namibian liberation struggle in independent Botswana could also be attributed to the border violations of armed Namibian freedom fighters. The eventual release of the captured fighters, however, proved uncomplicated. As these occurrences were rare exceptions, it has to be assumed that SWAPO clearly understood the policies of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana regarding the use of force and consciously adhered to them.

Many operations in Botswana demonstrated the dominant role of SWAPO in the liberation struggle, which consequently enabled the liberation movements, to a certain extent, to exploit the plight of the Namibian people and the members of the rival movement, SWANU. SWAPO seemed to have total control over the appointment of members to certain positions. The voice of the respective office-bearers was not taken into account. On the other hand, many SWAPO members turned out to be ideal targets for SWAPO's purposes because they had not fully understood what the liberation struggle was about and were prepared to follow any instructions they were given. Finally, SWAPO could act as the saviour to a considerable number of SWANU members, who were stranded in Botswana, thereby consolidating its stance as Namibia's "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people".

Interestingly, the last two chapters dealt with similar questions that researchers have analysed in the context of other African peoples' fight for freedom. In an essay on Ugandan exile politics in Zambia in the 1970s, Balam Nyeko addressed the need to focus on the activities of the Ugandan liberation movements in exile, on the role of ethnic identity in this context and on the nature of political consciousness in exile circles about the home situation. Nyeko asserts that this would contribute to a better understanding of Uganda's path to democracy and the setbacks it encountered on the way.¹⁵⁶ In this respect, the elaborations on SWAPO and SWANU in Botswana can contribute to a more thorough appreciation of the various contributions to Namibian independence.

Relatively speaking, the importance of Botswana was certainly less for SWAPO than for SWANU, because the alternatives for Nujoma's movement continuously increased throughout the liberation struggle. On the other hand, SWAPO managed to establish efficient structures in Botswana that enabled the organisation to take advantage of all the relevant factors: the WENELA transport system, the relatively lax handling of political agitation in the protectorate and the willingness of its members to follow party instructions on demand.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Nyeko 1996: p. 97

8 The Makunda Refugees and Nudo

From the previous two chapters it has become apparent that the range of opportunities was far wider for refugees and would-be freedom fighters belonging to SWAPO than to those who were affiliated to SWANU. The literature does not refer to any other liberation movement besides these two and, in fact, there was no other Namibian organisation that could truly claim to have been a liberation movement. When common fronts like the National Convention were established in the 1970s, they did include other political organisations, but these were based on tribal loyalties. Admittedly, looking at their composition, SWAPO and SWANU could not be completely absolved of tribal tendencies but, having integrated Namibians from different ethnic backgrounds, they could at least make a substantial claim to be a nationalist movement.

Recalling that the first calls for a termination of the South African mandate in Namibia came from the ethnic group of the Ovaherero, it does, however, not surprise completely that the Ovaherero actually did make efforts to establish a liberation movement that was independent from SWAPO and SWANU. These efforts were thought to be necessary by the Herero Chief's Council, which had distanced itself from SWANU and also realised that it was being sidelined by Nujoma's SWAPO. This chapter deals with the attempts of the Ovaherero to form a political party, which is still active today.

Although meaningless in terms of its impact on the outcome of the liberation struggle, this Herero case, which goes back to the year 1963, deserves a thorough analysis because it provides a prime example of the handling of refugees both in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and in Botswana. It shows, especially, the helplessness of the British; a large and unexpected movement of refugees could virtually turn everything upside down. Secondly, the movement of Ovaherero into Bechuanaland in 1964 illustrates the aimlessness and purposelessness of many refugees at any given stage of the liberation struggle. It did, however, attract the interest of both SWAPO and SWANU.

Undoubtedly, the efforts of the Ovaherero can be seen as a sign of the increasing ethnicisation of the liberation struggle. The Herero-Hereros felt left out of the liberation struggle and consequently turned to themselves to participate in the liberation of Namibia. One must give credit to their efforts insofar as it was quite an accomplishment to smuggle a group of 154 refugees from South West Africa into the Bechuanaland Protectorate without being noticed by the South African Police. However, apart from the coup of having transported the Ovaherero out of the country, no further successes could be celebrated. The whole movement was closely connected to Mburumba Kerina, the first Namibian

petitioner at the United Nations, who wanted to make use of this large Herero movement to boost his personal ambitions to lead the Namibian liberation struggle. Hence this chapter will commence with a depiction of Mburumba Kerina's efforts to become a central figure in the liberation struggle again after he had been expelled from SWAPO.

Mburumba Kerina

Kerina's situation after his expulsion from SWAPO

Mburumba Kerina had been expelled from SWAPO in July 1962 after having published plans about the formation of a new political party, made up of both SWAPO and SWANU, without having consulted the SWAPO leadership.¹ As he was no longer officially recognised as a SWAPO leader in the diplomatic arena, he left the United States in the aftermath of his dispute with SWAPO and arrived in the Bechuanaland Protectorate from Rhodesia on 23 July 1963, with his American wife and three children. Immigration officials indicated that he planned to remain in the British territory for up to two years.² A week after his arrival, the protectorate authorities declared that they would not recognise Kerina as a refugee and that he would only be granted a temporary residence permit.³

Although his period of grace was restricted thirty days, he made use of it by travelling extensively, above all to Ngamiland. This period was then extended and he shifted to Serowe, where he was occasionally helped financially by Seretse Khama.⁴ However, the British were still reluctant to grant Kerina and his family permanent residence. They regarded him as a "self-publicist and trouble-maker" and further held the view that Kerina could "scarcely be regarded as a *bona fide* political refugee and would be most unlikely to conform to the 'no politics' condition".⁵ In the first months of Kerina's stay in Bechuanaland, it had become more than obvious that Kerina, although he was a *persona non grata* in South West Africa, had not entered the protectorate for protection, and that he was using the territory for political agitation. This, of course, was in contravention of British refugee policies in the protectorate. The British administration was well aware that Kerina's influence was very much limited at that stage but protectorate officials remained sceptical about his endeavours in Bechuanaland.

¹ Cf. Emmett 1999: p. 325

² Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/460, 8, Bechuanaland Protectorate Central Intelligence Committee Reports, No. 7, 1963

³ Cf. Ibid.: CO 1048/343, 28 A, P J Hooton to MacKenzie, 30.7.63

⁴ Cf. Ibid.: FO 371/177153, 9, Jesse MacKnight to John E. Killick, 11.2.64 and CO 1048/460, 9, Bechuanaland Protectorate Central Intelligence Committee, No. 8, 1963

⁵ Cf. Ibid.: FO 371/177153, P.M. Foster to J.K.E. Broadley, 28.2.64

Kerina and his movements

When Mburumba Kerina became the first Namibian petitioner at the United Nations he believed that he would be the one who could lead the struggle of the people of South West Africa against South African occupation. Internationally he was better known than Kozonguizi or Nujoma. After the formation of SWAPO and SWANU, however, Kerina lost influence. He had been out of South West Africa for too long to know about current occurrences in South West Africa in detail, so that the newly emerged presidents, Kozonguizi and Nujoma, could easily step forward as the new leading figures when they were able to claim (in exile) to actually represent South West African nationalist organisations. Festus Muundjua asserts that:

he [Kerina] wanted to monopolise politics at the United Nations and when Kozonguizi came he came with the latest information from home and the knowledge of who is who, whereas Kerina went as a young boy and never grew up to know the big Herero politicians. And Kozonguizi was like an encyclopaedia to many diplomats. So balance of interest shifted to him.⁶

Kerina's attempt to unilaterally announce an agreement on a combined party with SWANU could be seen as a last effort to portray himself as SWAPO's leading representative. After the failure of this attempt and his consequent expulsion from SWAPO, Kerina was left to play a minor role, if any at all, in the emerging liberation struggle.

When Kerina reached Bechuanaland in 1963, he realised that he could take advantage of the fact that the Herero Chief's Council did not command the leverage on the liberation struggle it had hoped for, neither in SWAPO nor in SWANU. As SWAPO was regarded as an Ovambo organisation, and many felt that SWANU was dominated by the intellectual Ovambanderu elite, Kerina saw an opportunity to reinvolve the Herero-Hereros and present himself as their leader. By that time it was well known that no organisation, which was evidently based on one certain ethnic group or one tribe, could look for international support. In fact, du Pisani and others suggest that it was Kerina who had made the recommendation that OPO should be renamed SWAPO.⁷ Hence, when Kerina tried to assemble the Ovaherero in an organisation with a national outlook, this organisation should not include any reference to the Ovaherero in its name.

Kerina made a first attempt during his stay in Bechuanaland when he announced the formation of the Namib Convention Independence Party (NACIP) on 3 July 1964 with

⁶ Interview with Festus Muundjua, 22.8.08

⁷ Cf. du Pisani 1986: p. 149

him as president, Carlos Hamatui as his vice and Clemence Kapuuu as the deputy vice. Other office-bearers included Bartholomeus Karuaera, and Kuaima Riruako. The British regarded Kerina's endeavours as nothing more than a "counter-move" to the common front of SWAPO and SWANU, which was still in existence inside South West Africa at that time.⁸ In late September, however, Kerina announced that the party's name was to be changed into UNIIP (United Namib Independence People's Party). The office-bearers remained the same, and Hosea Kutako and Hendrik Witbooi were named honorary presidents.⁹ As the term "Namibia" was only used from 1967 onwards, it is striking that the name "Namib", evidently referring to the territory of South West Africa, had already been used three years earlier. This supports the thesis that it was indeed Mburumba Kerina who gave the country its name.

However, UNIIP was short-lived. It is not clear why Kerina persisted in changing the names of the organisations he was about to form. In retrospect Kerina asserts that:

NACIP and UNIPP were just names. They never became real political parties. We just had proposals and proposals and proposals until we arrived at NUDO. There were many names, UNIIP and so forth. But we had to come up with a much simpler name, an acronym that was going to have a fast impact on the people. That's how we formed NUDO. I used to send our proposals to the Chief's Council and vice versa, various proposals of names and things like that.¹⁰

Nonetheless, the question remains why Kerina informed the British and also the political parties in the protectorate of the formation of the various parties, if they were only meant to be proposals. It seems likely that there was disagreement between Kerina and the Chief's Council as to what name to give to the organisation. In any case, this stresses the Chief's Council involvement in the formation of the new organisation from its inception.

As has already become apparent, the name that was ultimately adopted was NUDO (National Unity Democratic Organisation). The party was officially founded in November 1964 and Kerina portrayed it as the "product of the political contradictions which have plagued the struggle of South West Africa (or Namib)".¹¹ Though termed "national", NUDO could at no stage claim to have any following beyond the Herero-Hereros. Yet, it was to this organisation that the large group of Ovaherero, who left South West Africa in 1964, claimed to belong and to which the refugees of that group felt affiliated. The details of this movement and its consequences follow below.

⁸ British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 231, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3.7.64

⁹ Cf. Ibid., CO 1048/344, E 245, UNIIP Political Manifesto

¹⁰ Interview with Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08

¹¹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, E 275, Kerina to Minister for Colonial Affairs, 16.11.64

Preparations for the movement

Bechuanaland

The contacts between Mburumba Kerina and the Chief's Council in Namibia seemed to be a mutually beneficial situation. Kerina thought that he would be able to emerge as a leader of a powerful organisation that could draw upon the Herero nation with Hosea Kutako and Clemence Kapuuo as the front men. The Herero Chief's Council sought to take advantage of Kerina's international contacts in order to establish a Herero organisation that could play a part in the armed resistance. Kerina had been in contact with the Chief's Council since his return from the United States and allegedly received financial assistance from the chiefs in South West Africa every month.¹² By the time Kerina arrived in Bechuanaland, he and the Chief's Council were aware of the fact that SWAPO was already sending their members for military training. As relations between the Herero chiefs and SWAPO had declined, the Ovaherero wanted to build their own army to fight against South African occupation. Kerina describes the rationale behind the Herero efforts to send people abroad to take an active part in the liberation struggle as follows:

Their mission was to go for military training even though when arriving in Bechuanaland never to mention that for fear that the South African securities and forces would probably arrest them one by one and kidnap them as they used to kidnap many of the refugees in the country of Botswana. We told them to say that they were students from cattle breeding Herero areas to learn the trade of working with skins and all those kind of things, mostly practical.¹³

In order to organise military training for a substantial number of Ovaherero, much preparation was necessary. In 1963 a group of young Ovaherero, emissaries from the Chief's Council, including Kuaima Riruako, crossed the border into Bechuanaland to meet Mburumba Kerina in Ngamiland. One of the meetings took place in the presence of Amos Dambe from the BDP, who later accompanied the Riruako's group back to the border. Kerina and Dambe had known each other from Serowe. The delegates from the Chief's Council discussed with Kerina how the Herero-Hereros could build their own army and how prospective soldiers could be moved out of South West Africa.¹⁴ The task-sharing was clear: Kerina was to organise further transport from Bechuanaland to the destinations from where he would arrange military training, whereas the Chief's Council would make sure that Ovaherero from various areas were selected and then taken to Bechuanaland.

¹² Cf. Interview with Rapanda Kaura, 11.9.08

¹³ Interview with Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08

¹⁴ Cf. Interviews with Kuaima Riruako, 4.8.08, Rapanda Kaura, 11.9.08 and Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08

Namibia

The selection of participants for the mission took place in total secrecy. Firstly, the Chief's Council was suspicious of SWAPO and SWANU activists and, secondly, the chiefs had to make sure that the South Africans did not become aware of the plans of the Chief's Council. Bartholomeus Karuaera, one of the main engineers of the military plans of the Chief's Council, estimated that there were about 350 Ovaherero from various Herero areas who volunteered to go into exile in order to receive military training. He remembered that:

they were collected from different areas during the night. Then they were taken to the border between Aminuis and Botswana. All of us were involved in doing the selection. In every area there was somebody who organised the registration.¹⁵

There seems to be consensus among Namibian veterans that it was Kuaima Riruako who eventually took the message to the Chief's Council that the group of selected Ovaherero were ready to be sent to Bechuanaland. The question remains, however, what this message was based on. One would expect that Kerina would be in the position to decide at what point preparations were completed, so that the Chief's Council could send its people. Rapanda Kaura, a member of the Herero group that eventually came to Bechuanaland, asserts that it was Riruako who made the decision knowing that arrangements had not yet been finalised. Kaura argued that Riruako had never wanted to receive military training; he wanted simply to become a representative of the Chief's Council or the party that was about to be formed by the Ovaherero in Ghana, where he had good connections to Kwame Nkrumah. Kaura alleges that Riruako never worried about preparations for military training, as long as he could proceed to Ghana. Riruako therefore urged the Council to



Fig. 24: Clemens Kapuuo (left) and Rev. Karuaera with a copy of the so-called Odendaal Report in 1964. The report became the blue-print for South Africa's homeland policy in Namibia

¹⁵ Interview with the Reverend Bartholomeus Karuaera, 7.8.08

start the movement, although he knew that it was not yet clear what would transpire once the group entered Bechuanaland.¹⁶

It is quite likely that this allegation was an excuse for the eventual failure of the whole project. This assumption is supported by Mburumba Kerina's statement relating to the commencement of the mission. Despite evident friction between Kerina and Riruako in current Namibian politics, Kerina did not mention any accusation against Riruako at that stage of the mission. One would imagine that, if Kaura's allegations had been true, Kerina would have supported them voluntarily.¹⁷

In any case, Riruako did provoke the commencement of the movement of 154 Ovaherero to Bechuanaland in early March 1964. It was to reveal the deficiencies of both the poor organisation of the military plans of the Ovaherero and the British administrative machinery in the protectorate.

The movement

The movement and the sudden stop

Out of the roughly 350 Ovaherero, a group of 154 escaped into Bechuanaland. It was a unique occurrence throughout the liberation struggle that took Pretoria by surprise because South Africa thought that due to her latent intimidation no one would ever be so bold as to try and send such a large number of South West Africans into exile at one time. However, the group, which included 16 of Hosea Kutako's councillors,¹⁸ managed to reach Kule, a tiny village in western Botswana. The group had been accompanied up to the border by some leading members of the Chief's Council, such as Bartholomeus Karuaera,¹⁹ but in Bechuanaland they had to fend for themselves. Some of the group members had been appointed as official leaders before the departure. They included Kuaima Riruako, Franz Tjiueza, Zacheus Tjiho and Absai Kandikirira.²⁰ (See cover photograph.)

As soon as the Ovaherero reached Kule, their presence was detected by British authorities. The British chose to send them out of Kule and, since they did not have any appropriate transport, David Finlay, the District Commissioner of Ghanzi, asked a local farmer who was in possession of three trucks to transport the Ovaherero. They were then simply referred to as "refugees" and transported to Makunda, a village a bit further north

¹⁶ Cf. Interview with Rapanda Kaura, 11.9.08

¹⁷ Cf. Interview with Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08

¹⁸ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, Salisbury to Commonwealth Relations Officer, 15.9.64

¹⁹ Cf. Interview with the Reverend Bartholomeus Karuaera, 7.8.08

²⁰ Cf. Interview with Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08

but right at the border to South West Africa.²¹ The group of the 154 Ovaherero arrived in Makunda on 5 March 1964 and was not allowed to proceed any further. The District Commissioner interviewed the refugees individually to ascertain that none of them had been granted a scholarship. The High Commissioner then established that since they were neither genuine students, nor *bona fide* refugees, they had to be dealt with in accordance with the immigration law, which would have provided for their return to Namibia.²² Zacheus Tjiho, one of the leaders of the group, recalls that the British were very suspicious because the refugee group only consisted of one ethnic group and their intention did not seem to be clear.²³ Of course, all group members claimed to have left South West Africa in order to receive practical or educational training abroad, but the fact that the majority of them could neither read nor write made it look highly improbable that the Ovaherero were in fact on their way to receive further education. In fact, it turned out that 127 were illiterate, only one had a Junior Certificate and most of the refugees had simply been farmers before.²⁴

This remarkable occurrence quickly caught the attention of the media, but the British did not try hard to conceal the refugee movement. Not only did they give journalists authority to fly into Makunda a week after the arrival of the group, British officials even transported journalists to the Ovaherero themselves.²⁵ Shortly before the arrival of the first journalists in Makunda on 10 March 1964, the headlines of the South African Cape Argus had read: "SWA drama. 200 slip across border. To be trained in subversion?"²⁶ The actual intention of the Ovaherero was soon detected, although the number was, of course, exaggerated. Though not always outspoken, the Cape Argus certainly was no apartheid mouthpiece and so it can be assumed that its analysis was not influenced by propaganda from Pretoria.

The British did not have such a clear conception of what the Ovaherero's intentions were. In fact, even more than a year later the British notions of the Ovaherero were vague, if not with a racist undertone. In 1965 the High Commissioner wrote to the Colonial Office:

The Herero are, by present-day African standards, a primitive and fairly closely knit tribal organisation. The bulk are in South West Africa and overlap into Bechuanaland in the

²¹ Cf. Interview with Ludwig Stanley, 16.8.08

²² Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 73, Lord Dundee to Lansdowne, 12.3.64

²³ Cf. Interview with Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08

²⁴ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 217+218, Fenner-Brockway and Stonehouse to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 29.5.64

²⁵ Cf. Interview with Kurt Dahlmann, 16.8.07

²⁶ Cape Argus, 10.3.64

Makunda area. Apart from settlements of no relevance, there is a limited but somewhat dissident Herero group in Ngamiland. They have the local reputation of being difficult.²⁷

Nonetheless, the British realised that scholarships were unlikely to be the actual motive behind the flight because it was improbable that any of the uneducated Ovaherero would have been granted a scholarship. This is why British officials attributed this mass exodus to economic plight or false incentives awakened by South West Africans in exile. Two weeks after the group had arrived in Makunda, the protectorate authorities invited Ivan Smith, personal representative of the UN Secretary General, to examine the situation in Makunda. Smith confirmed that it would prove impossible to find scholarships for the Herero group, because they were too many and were not qualified enough.²⁸ During his visit, he was constantly approached by Carlos Hamatui, one of Kerina's close associates, who made efforts to convince him of the likelihood that Kerina would soon organise scholarships for them.²⁹

Kerina himself, however, remained in Serowe and tried to involve British parliamentarians in the case of his Herero group. He wrote a letter to a British MP arguing that:

the great majority of these persons are students who intend to proceed elsewhere for studies. They require only time in which to have arrangements for their studies finalised.³⁰

Of course, there was no real question of studies and, for the time being, Kerina did not manage to bring about an improvement in the living conditions of the group in Makunda.

British reaction

British reaction to this unexpectedly large influx of refugees was exemplary for the indecisiveness of protectorate officials in Bechuanaland. Admittedly, the year 1964 was the first year that revealed that the conflict in South West Africa would crucially influence Bechuanaland. This had become clear when both Sam Nujoma and Jariretundu Kozonguizi, the presidents of the two well-known Namibian liberation movements, had entered the protectorate in early 1964 in order to organise further refugee traffic and to hold consultations with party members in exile. Hence, at the time when the Ovaherero entered western Botswana in March 1964, the protectorate Administration had already been occupied with the handling of critical refugee issues. We may recall that both SWANU and

²⁷ British National Archives, CO 1048/344, 324, Norman Walker to Colonial Office, 8.9.65

²⁸ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 195 C, Extract of the 133rd Meeting of the Executive Council, 16.4.64

²⁹ Cf. Ibid., 195 D, Notes No.4 of the Agenda of the 135th Meeting of the Executive Council, 30.4.64

³⁰ British National Archives, CO 1048/345, E (111) 1, Kerina to MP Stonehouse, 18.3.64

SWAPO had enjoyed a substantial degree of liberty, which was terminated when Kozon-guizi and Nujoma were declared prohibited immigrants after their departure.

Before the British started to deal seriously with the newly created problem, they had tried to establish the exact role of Mburumba Kerina. At that stage, he had not yet begun to announce the various names of his movements he was to form later in the year. His involvement in the movement was apparent, as he constantly advocated the onward movement of the refugee group. In April he went to see the District Commissioner in Maun requesting that his Herero group to be allowed to settle in Ngamiland. He would even threaten the non-co-operation of the Ovaherero in Makukung with the Batawana tribe, if his request were not granted.³¹ Kerina's threats, however, did not impress the British whose main concerns were their reputation and the potential threat from South Africa.

Soon after the arrival of the 154 Ovaherero, the British woke up to the dimensions of the problem they were facing. Bustling communication developed between Foreign and Colonial Office in London and various officials in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. It was clear that the decision about the refugees' future had to consider that there was no place for them to proceed to, as well as the turmoil their presence in Makunda might cause. On 9 March the Foreign Office in London deliberated whether it would not be the easiest solution to send the Ovaherero back from whence they came as their protracted stay in the protectorate would send out a wrong signal to other potential South West African refugees. But the danger that the repatriation of the group could be spotted by the South African Police, who might arrest them, argued against this proposal. After all, Pretoria had immediately taken note of the occurrences in Makunda. Johannes Vorster, the South African Minister of Justice, made use of this incident by putting Bechuanaland under general suspicion. He commented:

Let us not forget that the Bechuanaland Protectorate has become the corridor for saboteurs and others still to receive training in sabotage.³²

This was, as we have come to know, highly exaggerated. Yet, it illustrates that South Africa did not hesitate to exert pressure on the British. Pretoria was, of course, heavily in favour of a repatriation of the refugees.

Indeed, the British continued to deliberate on sending back the refugees. They were well aware that the removal of such a big group would have to involve the use of force. The British administration in Mafikeng declared on 17 March that the use of force would not matter. They added that such a move would certainly please South Africa because

³¹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 195 D, Notes No. 4 of the Agenda of the 135th Meeting of the Executive Council, 30.4.64

³² Daily Telegraph, 11.3.64

international protest would consequently be directed against the British, not Pretoria. Nonetheless, the Resident Commissioner recommended that it would be advisable to approach Pretoria first for assurances that no harm would be done to the Ovaherero in the case of the British repatriating them.³³

The Southern Africa Department in the Colonial Office drew up a scenario of the three most likely possibilities. If an assurance from South Africa that she would not take disciplinary action against the returnees were sufficient in persuading for the Ovaherero to return, this would be the most favourable option. If, however, they did not trust Pretoria, the use of force would have to be considered as a second option. Finally, the regularisation of entry by the High Commissioner would be an alternative solution.³⁴

Apparently, London was sceptical about the use of force. The Foreign Office contacted the British High Commission at the United Nations in New York to find out what the likely reactions at the UN would be if force were used to remove the Ovaherero from Makunda. The sober reply from New York was that “commotion” was possible and that this course of action could be used against the United Kingdom in the Committee of 24, which was the Special UN Committee on Decolonisation.³⁵ This information complicated the situation for the British. Before Pretoria confirmed that the Ovaherero would be allowed to return to South West Africa “unpunished and unvictimised”,³⁶ a forced removal of the refugees from the protectorate was out of question. The British ambassador in South Africa feared that the publicity, which would certainly be aroused by the attempt to remove the refugees with the use of force, might turn the Ovaherero into political refugees.³⁷ On 16 April it became apparent that Pretoria was not willing to guarantee the unharmed return of the refugees to South West Africa.³⁸

Nonetheless, reflections on a forced removal were intensified. In a meeting of the Executive Council, the Commissioner of Police expressed his confidence that he could effect such a removal if there were no political objections, but gave voice to his concern that such a move could result in widespread international odium. Still, he was convinced that

³³ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 91, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17.3.64

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 96, Southern Africa Department, Colonial Office to Minister of State, 18.3.64

³⁵ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, E 111, Foreign Office to UK Mission at UN, 19.3.64 and E 110, UK Mission at UN to Foreign Office, 20.3.64

³⁶ British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 195 C, Extract from Confirmed Minutes of 132nd Meeting of the Executive Council, 2.4.64

³⁷ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, E 134, Stephenson to Major Steward, 2.4.64

³⁸ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 195 C, Notes from the 133rd Meeting of the Executive Council, 16.4.64

Britain would be able to react to international criticism because the refugees had come to the protectorate voluntarily and there were no employment opportunities for them in the protectorate. In the meeting it was agreed that charitable or refugee organisations should be entrusted with the responsibility of feeding the refugees. The proposal was made that Amnesty International should care for their basic needs. Some members of the Executive Council rejected this proposal because they felt that living conditions should not be too comfortable for the refugees, or allow them to feel too much at home, as this would make repatriation even more difficult.³⁹

Due to the pressure exerted by the media, the Southern Africa Department of the Colonial Office felt impelled to issue a press statement outlining the guidance on the handling of refugees in the protectorate in order to enable the protectorate government to publicly clarify the British position. The statement emphasized that the protectorate would only allow two categories of South West Africans to enter its territory: genuine political refugees and students who had been offered scholarships in terms of the UN Resolution of 1962. It further read that the Ovaherero did not even have any political affiliation.⁴⁰ They had, of course, stressed that they were all members of Hosea Kutako's Chief's Council and that Mburumba Kerina was their representative abroad,⁴¹ but at that stage Kerina had neither founded NUDO, nor any of its short-lived predecessors. The refugees only referred to NUDO by name after its formation.

The British became progressively aware of the fact that a forced removal was not a realistic option, and therefore issued the refugees with temporary residence permits, valid for six months, in late April. Subsequently, the protectorate administration changed its tactics by simply trying to make the refugees' lives unpleasant, so that they would ultimately agree to return to South West Africa.⁴² In fact, there was not much more that needed to be done to create unpleasant living conditions. It would have required a greater effort to improve the circumstances under which the Ovaherero were living in Makunda. The plight of the Herero group even caught the attention of some of the political parties in Bechuanaland, namely those that did not have any members in the Executive Council and that would later end up in opposition. Motsamai Mpho complained to the Secretary of State for the Colonies about the British refusal to grant the Ovaherero official refugee status.⁴³

³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 179, Press Guidance from SADCO, 17.4.64

⁴¹ Cf. Interview with Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08

⁴² Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 212, Lansdowne to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4.5.64

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, E 219, Mpho to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28.5.64

British lack of decisive action in the handling of this delicate issue led to a perpetuation of the status quo. When the refugees' residence permits expired, they were simply renewed. The refugees had to present themselves to the authorities each week, then every two weeks or every month, and be counted. Furthermore, the British had imposed constraints on the Ovaherero: They were restricted to a twelve-mile radius around Makunda and they were, of course, not allowed to engage in politics.⁴⁴ By the end of 1965, the Secretary of State for the Colonies realised that the "no politics" condition actually posed a contradiction to Britain's previous policies. So far the "no politics" condition had only applied to refugees, whereas the Ovaherero in Makunda were, although constantly being referred to as refugees, not regarded as official refugees.⁴⁵ The question of what was going to happen to this large group of Ovaherero was still pressing when Botswana became independent in 1966.

The plight of the Herero group

Soon after the arrival of the 154 Ovaherero in Makunda, it transpired that no plans for their onward movement existed. It became evident that Mburumba Kerina had neither organised further transport, nor made any arrangements for military training abroad. The British were not prepared to allow the group to move away from Makunda and, furthermore, Zambia did not allow any Ovaherero belonging to that group to enter her territory. As soon as NUDO had been formed, the Ovaherero in Makunda all claimed to be members of the organisation. NUDO, however, never became an organisation that was recognised by the Liberation Committee of the OAU. Zambia therefore would have refused the Ovaherero entry; Zambian authorities even explaining this in a letter to Kerina.⁴⁶

In November 1964, Kerina approached the British authorities again requesting a transfer of the refugees to Francistown. He argued that this was necessary on humanitarian grounds because there they could receive the same treatment as all other refugees. He suggested that the refugees could help to rebuild the White House, which had been blown up in July of the same year.⁴⁷ It was, however, out of the question for the British to accept Kerina's request. Firstly, a transfer to Francistown would have meant that the Ovaherero at Makunda were suddenly recognised as official refugees. Secondly, this step

⁴⁴ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 195 C, Notes from the 133rd Meeting of the Executive Council, 16.4.64

⁴⁵ Cf. Ibid., CO 1048/344, 332+333, Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner, 3.11.65

⁴⁶ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 311, Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner, 16.4.65

⁴⁷ Cf. Ibid., CO 1048/344, E 266, Kerina to Minister for Colonial Affairs, 16.11.64

would have made it impossible to eventually repatriate the Ovaherero because they would then be staying on the other side of Bechuanaland far away from South West Africa. And thirdly, the refugees would probably have received better treatment in Francistown than in Makunda, which would have been contradictory to the British strategy of creating unpleasant living conditions for the Ovaherero.

Kerina never visited the refugees in Makunda. However, NUDO created the post of a “roving ambassador” to assist those stranded in Makunda, in order to communicate with the British authorities in Bechuanaland and try and raise funds for the group or establish contacts abroad so that the Makunda people could finally receive military training. This position was filled by Raua Tjiriange, an ethnic Herero from Maun, who held a British passport and could therefore easily travel to other African countries.⁴⁸ Tjiriange had met Kerina in Francistown and become interested in the endeavours of the former UN petitioner. He was given a van that had been purchased with funds Kerina had organised from the Ethiopian government. Kerina had good links to Haile Selassie and had closely worked with the Ethiopian government to prepare the court case of 1966.

The impact of Tjiriange’s work as the “roving ambassador” was, however, marginal. He accompanied Kerina on some trips abroad⁴⁹ but it was certainly Kerina with his international experience who was at the forefront when foreign governments were approached for financial support. Authorities in Botswana were puzzled when Tjiriange, who claimed to be a spokesperson for the refugees in Makunda, approached them. In a letter to the Presidential Office the Commissioner of Police remarks:

It would seem most desirable that South West African “refugees” in Botswana make their representations through a recognised refugee organisation and not through the self styled “NUDO roving ambassador” in Maun, who, as far as I am aware, has no official standing.⁵⁰

With regard to the position of Raua Tjiriange, a split within NUDO became apparent in 1968. The Herero leadership did not seem happy with Kerina’s appointments and the way he was handling the issue of the stranded Herero group. When he found out that Tjiriange was approaching the Botswana government in the capacity of an official representative of NUDO, Hosea Kutako sent a letter to Seretse Khama stating:

I have the honour to inform you that recent information received by me compels me to rescind the appointment of Mr Raua Tjiriange as NUDO roving ambassador [...].⁵¹

⁴⁸ Cf. Interview with Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08

⁴⁹ Cf. Interview with Elias Raua Tjiriange, 27.7.08

⁵⁰ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/60, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary to the President, 23.2.68

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Kutako to Khama, 30.3.68

Nonetheless, many of the refugees in Makunda were still convinced that Kerina would find a way to help them proceed into exile. Kerina, however, had already left the Bechuanaland Protectorate in November 1964 and was subsequently declared a prohibited immigrant. He had been arrested in Zambia together with Carlos Hamatui and Raua Tjiriange in late November 1964 because they had not met the immigration conditions.⁵² They were later allowed to proceed to Dar es Salaam. For Kerina the way back to Botswana was now barred; he was only able to stir the movement from afar.

The situation of the Ovaherero in Makunda remained desperate. By May the British attested to the refugees' "very frugal subsistence level." They concluded that the situation

in Makunda had become "explosive" because the refugees posed an "embarrassment to both the protectorate government and local inhabitants".⁵³

The presence of such a large group certainly imposed a great burden on the residents of Makunda. They were the descendants of the Ovaherero who had fled South West Africa after the war with the Germans, and a few Batswana. When the British held their weekly roll calls, they had great difficulty in establishing the exact number of refugees. It was rare for all the refugees to turn up for the roll calls. Some of the refugees had soon returned secretly once they realised



Fig. 25: Refugees waiting in Makunda, 1964/65

that the option of military training seemed to be out of reach. The majority of the 154, however, held out in Makunda. When in early 1966 the continuous drought in Bechuanaland required the protectorate government to act, the elders in Makunda complained that Makunda was the only village in the whole district of Ghanzi that had not received any famine relief. They, of course, attributed this to the presence of the Herero immigrants from South West Africa. Tensions between the locals and the refugees intensified

⁵² Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/344, E 279, British Commissioner Kampala to Commonwealth Relations Office, November 1964

⁵³ British National Archives, CO 1048/460, 22, Central Intelligence Committee Report No. 5, 1964

and the attitude of the Herero group towards the British authorities became more hostile. One officer, who was in charge of issuing the Ovaherero new residence permits in March 1966, reported that the refugees showed

[...] passive resistance and cold politeness mixed with haughty arrogance [...]. The question of fear of retaliation against locals for assisting the police cannot be ruled out.⁵⁴

Interestingly, the anger of the refugees was not directed at Kerina or any of the leaders of the Chief's Council or NUDO in South West Africa. Some of the refugees had relatives outside Makunda, but the twelve-mile restriction did not allow them to visit legally. This was one of the complaints Abdul Karim Essack brought when he approached the authorities of the protectorate on behalf of the NUDO group. Essack had been a South African refugee himself. He had consequently established himself as a self-styled refugee attorney in Lobatse and had learnt of the case of the Makunda refugees, possibly from Caleb Hangula, who acted as the NUDO representative in Francistown at that time (see p. 200). In a letter to the acting superintendent of police in Ghanzi Essack wrote that he and his company

have been instructed to intercede with the relevant authorities for the NUDO refugees in this matter. [...] We ask you to hold the matter in abeyance [...] as some, if not all the requisite conditions of residence outlined in the draft residence permit would seem not only to be too stringent, but exceed the bounds of the permissive powers conferred by the relevant legislation.⁵⁵

Essack was of course aware that refugees in other parts of the Bechuanaland Protectorate were not restricted by similar conditions. He was, however, assured that living conditions in Makunda did not give reason for concern⁵⁶ and, in the pre-independence confusion, Essack's complaint did not become a matter of further concern for either the outgoing or incoming government.

Another source of concern for the refugees in Makunda was the proximity to South Africa. They would have liked to move to Ngamiland or Francistown, not least for security reasons. Kurt Dahlmann, who visited the Ovaherero in Makunda in his capacity as the chief editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, the German speaking newspaper in Windhoek, reports that:

⁵⁴ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/12, Officer Commanding No. 6 District to Commissioner of Police, 12.3.66

⁵⁵ Ibid., A.K. Essack & Company to JHM Monour, 9.7.66

⁵⁶ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/12, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs to A K Essack, 1.9.66

it would have been easy to recapture the refugees. They were just a few metres behind the border.⁵⁷

The South African Police, however, tried to capture the refugees in a more subtle way. In October 1964, they instructed a resident from Bechuanaland to tell the refugees that he had found a dead body in the borderland area and that he believed it was a member of the Herero group. He wanted to provoke some of the refugees into unthinkingly crossing the border so that they could be arrested. The Ovaherero in Makunda saw through this plan and ultimately refused to have a look at the alleged dead body.⁵⁸

This quite simply illustrates the awkward situation in which the Ovaherero found themselves having followed the call of Kerina and the Chief's Council. They were barely tolerated by the British authorities, turned out to be an increasing burden for the government of independent Botswana and were in constant fear of South African reprisals.

Efforts to move on

Once the Ovaherero realised that onward traffic was impossible and arrangements for military training were nonexistent, tried to improve their situation. Although the 154 refugees had been restricted to a radius of twelve miles around Makunda, a group of six Ovaherero secretly left Makunda in late May 1964 and reached Ngamiland before being detected by the protectorate Police. The group was made up of those Ovaherero that had been appointed as the leaders of the movement in exile: Kuaima Riruako, Franz Tjiueza, Zacheus Tjiho, Matthews Karipose, Rihungira Mungunda and Absai Kandikirira. Since the leaders from Makunda were in breach of the conditions that had been imposed on them, they were arrested in Maun on 28 May.⁵⁹ Zacheus Tjiho claims that:

the intention was to inform the government about our coming to Botswana. We were afraid that those people living in Makunda did not inform the government about our plans. So we wanted to meet with the Botswana authorities so that we could inform them properly what our intention was all about.⁶⁰

It is arguable whether the six Ovaherero would have told the authorities the real purpose of their trip; the official declaration that they were on their way to military training, would have caused too much commotion and would have increased South African pressure on the British. The group was detained in Maun for three days before being

⁵⁷ Interview with Kurt Dahlmann, 16.8.07 (translated)

⁵⁸ Interview with Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08 and British National Archives, CO 1048/344, 251, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the colonies, 1.10.64

⁵⁹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/344, 243, Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner, 17.8.64

⁶⁰ Interview with Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08

deported to Ghanzi, where they were put on trial for not having obeyed to the immigration rules. In Ghanzi, they were fined 10 pounds each.⁶¹ When the refugees filed a protest against this ruling, the Rhodesian lawyer Leo Baron, who had defended Joshua Nkomo leader of the Zimbabwean liberation movement ZAPU, was contacted by Mburumba Kerina and subsequently flew to Lobatse where the case had been transferred. Eventually the court in Lobatse decided in the Ovaherero's favour and no fine was paid.⁶² After the court ruling the British frustration with the refugees increased. The authorities observed that the refugees in Makunda now regarded the mild sentence as a charter to move around freely.

Again in 1965 three refugees from Makunda were found in Maun, this time with the official request to settle in Ngamiland. For reasons stated previously, the protectorate officials did not allow this. One of the three, however, managed to escape to Francistown. By changing his name from Moses Katuuo to Micah Horongo, he gave authorities both in the protectorate and in Botswana the impression that there were NUDO refugees in the country who were not part of the group of the 154 Ovaherero that was stranded in Makunda.⁶³ Later, other members of the Makunda group clandestinely proceeded to Francistown and claimed to have entered the protectorate or Botswana at a later stage than 1964. On two occasions in 1965, the Commissioner of Police reported to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs that NUDO refugees, who had stated that they had secretly entered Bechuanaland in the middle of 1965, had claimed political asylum in Francistown. The authorities did not realise that they had simply changed their names and had indeed been part of the Herero group from Makunda.⁶⁴

When the Ovaherero who claimed that they were all "ordinary members [of NUDO] who want[ed] to demonstrate and look for further education"⁶⁵ were finally granted political asylum, they benefited from the policy of both the protectorate government and Botswana of not distinguishing between the different liberation movements from the various neighbouring territories. The government of Botswana had been made aware of the existence of NUDO by Kerina in various letters. Although Kerina was looked upon with suspicion after his dubious involvement in the election campaign before 1965, it was

⁶¹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/344, 249, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8.10.64

⁶² Cf. Interviews with Kuaima Riruako, 4.8.08, Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08 and Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08

⁶³ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs, 3.9.65 and Interview with Moses Katuuo, 27.9.08

⁶⁴ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs, 3.9.65 and 6.9.65

⁶⁵ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/23, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, 6.9.65

difficult for the Khama government to establish at that stage how many members belonged to NUDO and whether their efforts were worth supporting.

With few exceptions all NUDO refugees in Botswana were part of the group of the 154. An exception was Caleb Hangula who had previously been a SWAPO member. He had been involved in the National Union of South West African Workers, the first Namibian trade union, which had been formed in Dar es Salaam in 1962. After disagreements with SWAPO in exile, he had left Tanzania and claimed political asylum in Francistown in 1963 where he would have met with Tjiriange and Kerina whom he already knew from Tanzania. He was then persuaded to become the NUDO representative in Francistown.⁶⁶ In this capacity he assumed a similar function to the SWAPO representative by receiving the NUDO refugees and registering them in Francistown.⁶⁷ This, of course, only happened on a few occasions, because the majority of the Ovaherero remained in Makunda. In contrast to SWANU and SWAPO, NUDO never sent any members into exile on a regular basis after the failure of the movement in 1964.

Caleb Hangula, however, committed several offences in Botswana. In 1964, he was charged with common assault in Francistown and two years later was convicted of breaking into a store.⁶⁸ Even his fellow NUDO members admitted that he came into conflict with the law on several occasions. When he was caught with rhinoceros horns and elephant tusks, he was finally ordered to leave Botswana and Moses Katuuu, alias Micah Horongo, took over as the NUDO representative in Francistown.⁶⁹ Yet, this was an insignificant office because no more NUDO members were to arrive in Francistown. Most of the communication with the authorities in Botswana was dealt with by Kerina and Tjiriange. Micah Horongo consequently returned to Namibia in 1978.⁷⁰

The instigator, Mburumba Kerina, was reported to be in Ethiopia by early 1965. In March that year he informed the British High Commission in Addis Ababa that NUDO had been granted three scholarships from the Ethiopian government.⁷¹ This was an artful paraphrase of the availability of military training. At that time the British did not object to NUDO members voluntarily leaving the country, as this would relieve them of a burden and the potential fighters would afterwards be declared prohibited immigrants. When Zambia finally agreed to accept the transit of the three NUDO refugees after receiving assurances that they were welcome in Ethiopia, Joseph Karuaihe, Rapanda Kaura

⁶⁶ Cf. Interview with Mburumba Kerina, 27.9.08

⁶⁷ Cf. Interview with Moses Katuuu, 27.9.08

⁶⁸ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/60, Archibald Mogwe to Kerina, 7.2.67

⁶⁹ Cf. Interview with Moses Katuuu, 27.9.08

⁷⁰ Cf. Interview with Moses Katuuu, 27.9.08

⁷¹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/11, Kerina to UK High Commission, Addis Ababa, 25.3.65

and Erhardt Kandji left the Bechuanaland Protectorate on 7 October 1965. They were accompanied by Kuaima Riruako, who was about to take up his job as a representative of NUDO in Ghana, (he was ordered to leave Ghana when Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown in February 1966).⁷²

Karuaihe, Kaura and Kandji spent three years at the Military Academy in Harar in Ethiopia. When Kaura and Karuaihe arrived at Dar es Salaam in 1970 with the intention of joining forces with SWAPO, they were temporarily detained. While under restriction in Tanzania, the two trained fighters approached the Botswana government through the OAU to find out whether they could “put their services at the disposal” of the government in Gaborone,⁷³ having realised that SWAPO was not willing to integrate non-SWAPO fighters into PLAN. After leaving the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1965, they had been declared prohibited immigrants and the Botswana government felt bound to keep to this decision and avoid possible future unrest. Kaura and Karuaihe were subsequently persuaded to join cadres of Holden Roberto’s FNLA (Frente Nacional da Libertação de Angola) in Zaire, where they helped to train fighters for the struggle against the Portuguese in Angola.⁷⁴ This, of course, was the end of their endeavours to take an active part in the struggle for Namibian independence.

While some refugees from Makunda had (partly undetected) left for Ngamiland, Francistown, Ethiopia, Ghana and even South West Africa, the roll calls both British and Botswana authorities conducted regularly proved that the number of refugees in Makunda had diminished. In November 1965, the British counted 81 refugees without being able to adequately explain what had happened to the rest. Many were believed to have returned to South West Africa, though some only temporarily, but others could not be accounted for.⁷⁵ In some cases this was because protectorate officials did not realise that some refugees had been granted political asylum as NUDO members under a false name.

The involvement of SWAPO and SWANU in the Makunda case

The sudden presence of this large group of refugees in Makunda complicated the escape into exile for SWAPO and SWANU refugees. Helao Shityuwete recalled that refugees who escaped from South West Africa via the Mamono Border Post were thought to be

⁷² Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/11, Commissioner of Police to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, 12.10.65 and Interview with Katuutire Kaura, 11.8.08

⁷³ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/22, OAU to Office of the President, 16.7.70

⁷⁴ Cf. Interview with Rapanda Kaura, 11.9.08

⁷⁵ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/11, Draft on South West African immigrants to Makunda, 5.11.65

part of the Herero group or, at least, regarded with increased suspicion.⁷⁶ Even to SWAPO and SWANU refugees, the movement of the 154 Ovaherero came as a big surprise. They had not heard of any political organisation besides the Chief's Council, and the refugees in Makunda did not talk openly to them.⁷⁷

A few days after the arrival of the Ovaherero in Makunda, Ambrosius Kandji arrived with a group of 14 SWANU and SWAPO refugees. This was at the time when there was an internal agreement on a common front (SWANLIF) of the liberation movements. Suspicion between Kandji's group and the NUDO people, however, persisted. The UN representative visiting the Makunda group ascertained that the members of Kandji's group seemed "well selected scholarship material"⁷⁸ and, as it was a mission under the common front SWANLIF, the internal self-government in Northern Rhodesia allowed the group to enter her territory for transit purposes. During the stay of Kandji's group in Makunda, the two groups did not mix.⁷⁹ However, Ambrosius Kandji approached the Ovaherero and offered to take them through Bechuanaland on this SWANLIF mission. The majority rejected the offer, but three Ovaherero, who had probably realised that Kerina's announcements were empty promises, joined Kandji and declared themselves part of his mission.⁸⁰ Kandji assured the British authorities he would find scholarships for them and was allowed to cross Bechuanaland with his group and the three Ovaherero, who were originally part of Kerina's mission.⁸¹

No doubt Kandji's move posed an affront to the Chief's Council in general and to the Herero group in Makunda in particular. They lacked the international recognition that SWANU still enjoyed at that stage. Consequently, feelings of envy and resentment towards SWANU grew stronger and the stranded Ovaherero tried to rationalize their plight by accusing Ambrosius Kandji of having informed the British authorities about the actual intention of the movement. They argued that they had only been stopped by protectorate officials because Kandji had informed the authorities that they were on their way to military training.⁸² SWANU veterans, however, claim that this rumour was simply spread

⁷⁶ Cf. Interview with Helao Shityuwete, 15.9.08

⁷⁷ Cf. Interview with Nickey Iyambo, 7.10.08

⁷⁸ British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 164+165, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Resident Commissioner, 15.4.64

⁷⁹ Cf. Interview with Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08

⁸⁰ Cf. Interviews with Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08 and Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08 and British National Archives, CO 1048/343, Telegram from His Majesty's Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13.4.64

⁸¹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 164+165, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Resident Commissioner, 15.4.64

⁸² Cf. Interviews with Mburumba Kerina, 7.8.08 and Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08

by Kerina, who wanted to cover up his failure in arranging military training.⁸³ Many interviews the author conducted on this issue are suggestive of the fact that this rumour had been circulating for a long time.

In an interview with the author, Ambrosius Kandji refers to these allegations pragmatically:

That was a very good thing, that I was a force to tell the Botswana government that they should not allow them. [...] To tell Botswana not to allow these – then I would be a big authority. They knew that these people were not going to school because Kerina simply tried to grab his chance to get military training somewhere.⁸⁴

Kandji's argument is not correct. The British most likely would have been guided by the recommendations of a Namibian freedom fighter they considered to be an insider. The whole debate misses the point though. The biggest problem was not that the Ovaherero were not allowed to move away from Makunda, but that there were no arrangements made for further transport and, ultimately, for military training. There is little doubt that the Ovaherero would have been allowed to cross Bechuanaland and Zambia had they been able to produce some proof that they had been accepted for studies abroad. In fact, this is exactly what happened with the group of Kaura, Karuaihe and Kandji. When the British authorities were informed that they had been granted scholarships in Ethiopia (although the intention was always military training), both Bechuanaland and Zambia eventually allowed them to pass through their territory. In other words: if the British had allowed them to proceed from Makunda, the 154 Ovaherero would have ended up in the White House in Francistown, or they would have been stranded in Kazangula without permission to enter Zambia.

Admittedly, there is some indication that the British might have suspected that the Herero group was on its way for military training. In his autobiography, Helao Shityuwete writes that the District Commissioner of Ghanzi mentioned his assumption that the 154 Ovaherero were on their way to receive military training abroad,⁸⁵ although there is no mention that this assumption was based on any alleged warning from Ambrosius Kandji. It is all the more interesting to observe that a few days after the arrival of the Ovaherero in Makunda, British officials attributed this large influx to the UN Scholarship Program for South West Africa, which had been introduced in 1962. According to internal communication, it was suspected that the scholarship program had only been partly understood and that, as a consequence of these misconceptions, the Herero group

⁸³ Cf. i.a. Interviews with Claudius Kandjou, 14.8.08 and Festus Muundjua, 22.8.08

⁸⁴ Interview with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

⁸⁵ Cf. Shityuwete 1990: pp. 83–84

had headed for exile.⁸⁶ If the British had stopped the Herero movement because of information about military plans from Kandji, they would not have made these assumptions. The allegations against Kandji therefore seem to be unfounded.

Interestingly, allegations were only made against Kandji and SWANU, and not against SWAPO, although at that time there was little co-operation between SWAPO and the Chief's Council. SWAPO later stood in NUDO's way when they refused to accept trained NUDO freedom fighters. Nonetheless, SWAPO's interest had been aroused when the Ovaherero arrived in Makunda. Certainly, Nujoma wanted to take advantage of their presence. During his month-long stay in the Bechuanaland Protectorate in March 1964, he approached the British High Commissioner and asked for political asylum for the Makunda refugees. He claimed that SWAPO had made arrangements for them to obtain scholarships abroad.⁸⁷ Apparently he was hoping to detach the refugees from under the control of Kerina and the Chief's Council for the benefit of SWAPO. However, this approach failed. In January the following year, SWAPO concentrated British attention on the Makunda case again. In a letter to the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs, SWAPO wrote:

SWAPO wishes to draw the attention of Her Majesty's government to the presence of political refugees in the Bechuanaland Protectorate whose status is not properly defined. We request clarification of their position and their being recognised as political refugees.⁸⁸

At that stage it was clear that Kerina had been unable to organise military training for such a large group. So this approach can once again be seen as an attempt by SWAPO to exploit the situation by lobbying for the refugees ultimately to divert them towards SWAPO. This never materialised. Around 1970 Lucky Shoopala repeatedly approached the refugees in Makunda allegedly threatening that if they did not join SWAPO, they would never get out of their misery; Shoopala's recruitment attempts proved to be in vain.⁸⁹

Relations with tribal leaders

We have already learned that in terms of African immigration, the African authorities had an important say as well. However, the area of western Botswana, where the Ovaherero entered did not come under the legislation of an African authority, as it did not form part of tribal lands such as the Bangwato Reserve in eastern Botswana, or Ngamiland of the

⁸⁶ British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 65, Foreign Office to UK Mission at UN, 9.3.64

⁸⁷ Cf. British National Archives, CO1048/343, 117, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24.3.64

⁸⁸ British National Archives, CO 1048/344, E 300, SWAPO Telegram to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 12.1.65

⁸⁹ Cf. Interview with Joel Zemburuka, 27.9.08

Batawana. Yet, the Herero Headman of Makunda, Kavengere, felt a certain responsibility when his ethnic relatives arrived in his village. Ambrosius Kandji recalled that he wanted to stay out of the conflict between SWANU and NUDO wishing simply to support the Namibian liberation struggle.⁹⁰ This experience coincides with the general attitude of the Ovaherero in Botswana towards the liberation struggle that has been observed so far. The British too noted that the headman in Makunda was initially sympathetic to the 154 Ovaherero. Only later did a change of attitude occur when he became aware that the refugees were not allowed to proceed to Francistown.⁹¹ By the time the Ovaherero arrived in Makunda, people in western Botswana had seen quite a few refugees from South West Africa passing by, so it was thought that the stay of such a large refugee group in Makunda would be temporary. Consequently, tensions developed. Makunda did not have many inhabitants; it was a small village in the Kalahari and thus it was difficult to sustain a large group of people. In August 1965, the headman of Makunda appealed to the British administration for help:

They [the refugees] are my sons, but there are too many of them and I would like to have the responsibility of having them removed from me.⁹²

Although by then the number of the Ovaherero in Makunda had already decreased, they still posed a great burden on the locals. Despite the Herero origin of some, they were understandably not up to the task of supporting such a big refugee group. This complaint was a warning that the independent government of Botswana would have to tackle this issue seriously.

The crisis caused by the influx of the Ovaherero into Makunda provoked the involvement of the tribal authority of the Batawana, the Regent Elizabeth Pulane Moremi, who had been reigning over the Batawana since the death of her husband in 1942. When Kerina made efforts to move his people to Ngamiland, shortly after their arrival in Makunda, he knew that he would have to consult with the traditional authority, in this case with Moremi. On 10 April, however, Moremi refused to give the Ovaherero permission to enter Ngamiland.⁹³ This was the British stance as well. Yet, when Kerina threatened them with the non-co-operation of the Ovaherero in Makakung (who were living under the jurisdiction of Moremi), the leader of the Batawana was forced to agree. Kerina pretended that he had organised further transport for the refugee group and there-

⁹⁰ Cf. Interview with Ambrosius Kandji, 17.8.08

⁹¹ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 195 C, Extract from Confirmed Minutes of 132nd Meeting of the Executive Council, 2.4.64

⁹² British National Archives, CO 1048/344, 324, Norman-Walker to Campbell, 8.9.65

⁹³ Cf. British National Archives

fore needed to move the Ovaherero to Ngamiland. However, Kerina never managed to live up to the expectations he raised.⁹⁴ Transport never arrived and the temporary consent of the Regent of the Batawana never became relevant. The group of the six escapees from Makunda met with Moremi in Maun in May 1964. Zacheus Tjiho remembers that she was “sympathetic” but that felt that the six should contact the District Commissioner in Maun with their concerns.⁹⁵

Undoubtedly, the refugees in Makunda quickly depleted the sympathy they had been met with originally. For the traditional authority in Maun, the Makunda refugees never became a burden because, with few exceptions, they never entered Ngamiland. For the locals in Makunda, however, the situation soon became almost unbearable.

Consequences of the protracted stay in Botswana

A last attempt

At a time when the authorities in Botswana seriously considered resettling the NUDO refugees (see p. 210 f.), Kerina’s agitation in Ethiopia made it possible for a few more Ovaherero in Makunda to be sent for military training. Kerina provided the authorities in Botswana with a list of 15 names of Makunda refugees who had allegedly been granted scholarships in September 1967 by the Ethiopian government.⁹⁶ At that time, however, it proved impossible to locate all these 15 Ovaherero. Hence, the authorities in Botswana made an effort to include Caleb Hangula; this would have solved the problem of his undesirable presence in Francistown.⁹⁷ As the process of identifying the NUDO refugees went ahead rather slowly, Kerina became impatient and almost spoiled the move of NUDO refugees to Ethiopia by attacking the UNDP representative. Kerina blamed him for the slow processing of refugees in an impolitely drafted letter in October 1968.⁹⁸

Eventually, nine Ovaherero from Makunda received permission to leave Botswana for Ethiopia in early 1969. To them it was clear that their trip to Ethiopia did not mean further education, but the chance of military training. They received military training at the Military Academy of Harar from 1969 to 1970. On leaving the academy, they soon discovered they faced the same problems as their colleagues had done before ending up in prison in Dar es Salaam. There was no way they could actively get involved in the

⁹⁴ Cf. British National Archives, CO 1048/343, 195 C, Notes No. 4 of the Agenda of the 135th Meeting of the Executive Council, 28.4.64

⁹⁵ Interview with Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08

⁹⁶ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/60, Kerina and Mbaeva to Director of UN Educational and Training Program for SWA, 28.9.67

⁹⁷ Cf. Ibid., J.H.N. Lloyd to Office of the President, 21.11.67

⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid., Kerina to Schlatter, 23.10.68

Namibian liberation struggle. Consequently, they joined the FNLA camps in Zaire where they soon realised that it would be impossible to organise further military training for those comrades who were still stranded in Makunda.⁹⁹

The continuing presence in Makunda

The NUDO figures given by the authorities in Bechuanaland and Botswana differed substantially from the numbers NUDO veterans gave the author in interviews concerning the presence of refugees in Makunda. Joel Zemburuka, one of the 154 Ovaherero, reckoned that by 1976 there were slightly less than a hundred Ovaherero of the original group still in Makunda.¹⁰⁰ A roll call in 1969 by the Botswana authorities, however, revealed 51 refugees present in Makunda.¹⁰¹ The fact that the authorities could not account for all the refugees who had supposedly disappeared, and the continued disobedience of the refugees, argue for a larger number of refugees in Makunda than the authorities believed. Nevertheless, by the end of 1969, the refugees were finally given Special Residence Permits that allowed them to stay beyond the usual six-month permit.¹⁰² These could only be issued to refugees who appeared at the regular roll calls. Previously the authorities in Botswana were concerned about the presence of the refugees in Makunda and what should be done about this. In 1968 after the establishment of the Refugee Advisory Committees, the Botswana government temporarily considered offering them the same process as other refugees who had to present their cases before the committees. This would have meant bending the rules if the outcome was to be positive. The implication was that the application of the Immigration Law could have resulted in the repatriation of all the Ovaherero from the 1964 group.¹⁰³

However, the authorities observed that over the years the remaining refugees in Makunda were not actually living under such miserable conditions, especially when compared to the living standards of the ordinary Batswana. Botswana officials, in particular the District Commissioner of Ghanzi, were regularly approached with complaints about the alleged misery in which the refugees were living in Makunda, either by the refugees themselves, by welfare organisations or the opposition parties in Botswana. Local authorities, however, observed that:

⁹⁹ Cf. Interview with Zacheus Tjiho, 27.9.08

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Interview with Joel Zemburuka, 27.9.08

¹⁰¹ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/4, P J Heady to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, 15.4.69

¹⁰² Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/4, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs to Permanent Secretary to the President, 29.12.69

¹⁰³ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/12, P J Heady to DC Ghanzi, 6.9.68 and OP 55/4, P J Heady to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, 15.4.69

while they [the refugees] have complained of hardship, it is apparent that most of them get considerable funds from their relatives in South West Africa and generally they have a higher standard of living than the other residents of Makunda. [...] If the local inhabitants of Makunda request that they be moved elsewhere, it should be stated that it is thought that Makunda is the best place for them to remain and government has no plans to move them elsewhere.¹⁰⁴

Nonetheless, the plans to leave the refugees in Makunda were temporarily put aside once the Botswana government seriously considered resettling the Ovaherero in other parts of the country. These considerations will be looked at in the next subsection. It is, however, noteworthy that there were regular movements between Makunda and Namibia. Evidently, there was no South African interference when Ovaherero crossed the border to see their relatives in Namibia. Yet, in the other direction it was more difficult. Bartholomeus Karuaera reports that he was once on his way to Makunda together with Kuaima Riruako's father in order to take the refugees some money. They were arrested by the South African Police before they managed to cross the border.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, there did seem to be occasional exchange between the Ovaherero in Namibia and the Herero refugees in Makunda.

It is striking that the Ovaherero managed to cross into South West Africa, but still refrained from returning for good. Fear of South African patrols could not have been that great, otherwise they would not have dared to cross the border from Botswana at all. It is more probable that the Ovaherero who had left South West Africa with the intention of being sent for military training still had hope that things would turn out for the better. In fact, as we learned in the previous subsection, a few more members of the group were granted the opportunity to go to Ethiopia at a later stage. From the depiction of life in Makunda by one of the NUDO refugees who had spent many years in Makunda, we can conclude that the refugees did not feel that their life was worse compared to what it had been in South West Africa. Joel Zemburuka recalls that:

life was just as it is in the communal areas here [i.e. in Namibia]. There were no jobs there. We sustained ourselves among the people. Those were our own people, like our relatives. We were farming together.¹⁰⁶

There was therefore no need for the Ovaherero to go back as long as they did not struggle with life too much and as long as they received financial support from home.

¹⁰⁴ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/4, Notes for His Excellency's meeting at Makunda, 1.9.69

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Interview with the Reverend Bartholomeus Karuarea, 7.8.08

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Joel Zemburuka, 27.9.08

Mburumba Kerina, however, made a final attempt to contact the refugees in Makunda. Kerina, Riruako and two other NUDO members sent a letter from New York to Seretse Khama in June 1970. They asked him to grant them a plot of land in Ngamiland where they wanted to build a boarding school, which they intended to call “Namibian Technical College”. In their letter they argued that they wished to provide education to both Namibians and Batswana in Botswana and claimed to have organised financial assistance from individual donors in the United States.¹⁰⁷ As the NUDO representatives felt the hesitation on the Botswana side, Kerina argued in a discussion with the Botswana High Commissioner at the United Nations that his project would also strengthen the position of the BDP in Ngamiland. He pointed to the success of Motsamai Mpho in the 1969 elections and argued that the establishment of a new school would attract voters in the north-western constituencies.¹⁰⁸

Indeed Motsamai Mpho, leader of the Independence Party, had won a seat in a constituency in Ngamiland. In 1970 more than four years before the next elections, the recapture of this seat was a weak incentive for the Khama government. Besides, they had earlier come to the conclusion that Kerina was a person who should be handled with caution. Consequently, there was no reason to agree to the offer.

Reflecting on the intention behind the NUDO request, one cannot ignore the position of the NUDO refugees in Makunda. The proposed establishment of a school would have made it possible for them to at least get some education and would provide an opportunity for Kerina to prove that he had organised a programme for the Ovaherero. The government of Botswana, however, did not see any necessity to build another school and so questioned Kerina’s intention from the beginning. The Botswana High Commissioner at the United Nations phrased their reluctance accordingly:

Around UN circles Kerina is taken as a shady figure, full of intrigue, ready to scandalize SWAPO leaders for his own personal gain. I am not so sure that his participation in the type of assistance which is desired for Namibian refugees in Botswana does not prejudice the whole idea, as well condemn his fellow men.¹⁰⁹

This was the last time Kerina approached the government of Botswana. In the following years, events in Namibia had a much greater impact on the situation of the Ovaherero in Makunda. In 1975 Clemence Kapuuu announced that he would take part in the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference, which the South Africans claimed was going to bring

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Botswana National Archives, OP 55/68, Kerina, Riruako, Mbaeva and Mbaha to Khama, 1.6.70

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Ibid., T.J. Molefhe, BW Mission to UN to Seretse Khama, 23.6.70

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

greater freedom to the Namibian people.¹¹⁰ Once negotiations were underway, Kapuuu informed the Ovaherero in Makunda that the question of Namibian independence was to be settled at the negotiating table. Joel Zemburuka remembers that:

Chief Clemence Kapuuu had sent a word that negotiations inside Namibia through the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference started and there was no more any need to try to go to war against the South African government and negotiations at the UN were also on the way. When we returned, we officially came through the gate without any prevention or harassment from the South African government.¹¹¹

According to Zemburuka, all but six NUDO refugees, who still remained in Makunda, heeded Kapuuu's call to return to Namibia. The remaining six, however, chose to stay behind and eventually acquired Botswana citizenship.¹¹²

The question of resettlement

The longer the refugees stayed in Makunda, the more they became a thorn in the flesh of both Makunda residents and local and even national authorities in Botswana. Even BPP members deplored the "disruptive effect" the refugees' presence had in Makunda.¹¹³ As a consequence, the Ministry for Local Government and Lands was summoned by the Office of the President in December 1969 to enquire if any District Commissioner knew a suitable place in any rural area where the refugees from Makunda could be settled. Interestingly, the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President remarked that it would not be advisable to consult the traditional authorities.¹¹⁴ This was certainly an indication of the strained relations between the government in Gaborone and the chiefs who by then had realised that their power was substantially limited in independent Botswana. Later, their advice was again sought.

Responding in April 1970, the Ministry of Local Government and Lands recommended the Toromoja area in the Central District as the best option to resettle the NUDO refugees. Sehitwa and Mahalapye (despite already possessing a Herero population) were not deemed appropriate because the Ovaherero in these areas were considered to be unreliable, and no District Commissioner suggested any of these areas. However, the small settlement at Toromoja, which was home to a community of Ovambanderu, was not deemed more appropriate because of a greater reliability of the local community, but

¹¹⁰ Cf. Du Pisani 1986: p. 286

¹¹¹ Interview with Joel Zemburuka, 27.9.08

¹¹² Cf. Ibid.

¹¹³ Botswana National Archives, OP 55/4, Terence Finley to David Finlay, 23.6.69

¹¹⁴ Cf. Ibid., Permanent Secretary to the President to Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local government and Lands, 31.12.69

rather due to the belief that by sending the Ovaherero from Makunda to Toromoja, the government could regain greater control over this distant community as it would then be able to appoint a headman for the area. Furthermore, the government hoped that the UN would make funds available for this remote and underdeveloped area for the resettlement of the Makunda refugees.¹¹⁵ This example illustrates that not only did the government in Gaborone have limited knowledge of the Herero settlements in the country, basing its decision on vague assumptions of the District Commissioners, but that it tried to exploit the situation by trying to turn the project of resettling the refugees into a development project with foreign aid.

Consequently, an application for assistance was made to the UNHCR in June of the same year. The traditional authority for the area of Toromoja, Sekgoma Khama of the Bangwato, had by then agreed to the proposal of the government. Furthermore, Gaborone argued that the Botletle River in the area provided ample supplies of water throughout the year.¹¹⁶ The response from the UNHCR, however, was negative, and farms in western Botswana and the area of Makakung and Sehitwa were suddenly considered for resettlement as well.¹¹⁷ The fact that the authorities refrained from the resettlement plans in Toromoja, as soon as it was clear that no UN funds would be made available, showed that this choice had only been strategic and was never made in the interests of the refugees.

The lack of determination on the part of the Botswana government and the refusal of the traditional authority of the Batawana, Chief Letsholathebe, to give his permission to a resettlement in Sehitwa or Makakung eventually led to the failure of the plans. The refugees remained in Makunda until the majority of them left in 1976 as discussed above. This example illustrates that in the first years after independence, Botswana still lacked administrative structures and organisational capacity to cope with the challenges that the refugees' presence in Makunda posed. At that stage, the government in Gaborone was greatly concerned with the development of a basic infrastructure, and financial means were not yet available for a humanitarian mission in this particular case so that, finally, the only viable option in the NUDO refugee case was one of non-interference.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Ibid., Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local government and Lands to Permanent Secretary to the President, 8.4.70

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ibid., Application to the UNHCR, 12.6.70

¹¹⁷ Cf. Ibid., Permanent Secretary to the President to Division of Planning and Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture, 16.7.70 and Permanent Secretary to the President to Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local government and Lands, 13.10.70

Conclusion

Of course one can simply dismiss these occurrences as marginal in the liberation struggle. One can argue that although the movement of the 154 Ovaherero proved determination, it by no means contributed towards the fight for Namibia's independence. However, the movement clearly unmasked values and attitudes behind refugee policies and the effect these had both in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and in Botswana. The movement though forms part of the more recent Herero history and has, in this context, regained some prominence, also on the international level.

From the time the 154 Ovaherero were discovered in the Bechuanaland Protectorate in March 1964 up until the time the majority of them left with the formation of the Turnhalle Conference in 1976, one never had the impression that the NUDO refugees were at any stage welcome. They were seen as a matter of political, financial and material concern. Above all, the British concern was political. They did not want to provoke Pretoria by helping the refugees in any meaningful way. It was evident that this case was different to all other previous refugee movements from South West Africa simply because of the magnitude of the movement. It had thus to be handled with special care and consideration. Yet, pressure was also exerted from the other side of the political spectrum. The British were well aware that they could not afford to disregard the impact of public opinion and the United Nations when handling the case. This dilemma leaves the analyst with the impression that British agitation was not shaped by confidence or moral considerations, but simply by the attempt to get out of the issue as undamaged as possible. This is clearly expressed by the British endeavours to limit the access of welfare organisations to the people in Makunda. The British administration was thrown off guard by the sudden arrival of this large refugee movement and never developed a strategy to come to terms with the situation.

When the new government in Gaborone came to power in 1966, it faced many challenges. Compared to the economic development of the country, the fragile state of the country's infrastructure and the presence of all the recognised southern African liberation movements in Francistown, the issue of the refugees in Makunda was of minor importance. Consequently, the Botswana authorities were not driven by the aim of guaranteeing adequate living conditions. Their objective was to ensure that the Herero issue would not escalate, resulting in their half-hearted initiative to resettle the Ovaherero.

The movement, however, played an important part in Herero politics. Admittedly, it was largely inspired by Mburumba Kerina's ambition to become the overall leader of the Namibian liberation struggle. It was though the expression of the confidence of the

Ovaherero wanting to demonstrate that they were capable of taking a prominent part in the fight for independence. Despite the failure of the movement, the project of the 154 Ovaherero has become part of Herero history and thereby influences Herero identity and Herero tradition. On the eve of the inauguration of a Herero sub-chief in September 2008 in Okahitwa (near Okakarara in central Namibia), the author witnessed Herero songs and Herero dancing around the fire commemorating the escape into exile of the 154 in 1964. The lyrics of the songs praised the leaders of the movement and it appears that the undertaking of 1964 has passed into legend.

The rootedness of this movement in Herero history became apparent in a parliamentary motion in October 2008, which was introduced by DTA President, Katuutire Kaura, in the National Assembly. In this motion Kaura argued that it was appropriate that those still alive among the 154 Ovaherero should be considered for the war veterans' pension that had been established shortly after the launching of the Ministry of War Veterans in late 2006. Kaura emphasised that:

those who came back to Namibia had to start their lives from scratch to try and eke out a living in Namibia having suffered more than fifteen years of their productive lives. Therefore in view of the fact that we have a veterans' bill which is assisting those who lost their productive years in the struggle for Namibia I feel they must all be considered under the veterans bill and receive N\$ 2000 per month with all the other veterans.¹¹⁸

Despite the period of 15 years being a slight exaggeration, the request for the veterans' pension most importantly bears a political dimension regarding the strengthening of the DTA's profile in the current Namibian political scene. It is noteworthy that this occurrence, which dates back more than 40 years, is still very much present in the Ovaherero's minds and deemed important enough to be discussed in parliament. Without any doubt it was a boost to Herero self-confidence that such a large group crossed into Bechuanaland without being detected by South African Police. In retrospect another Ovaherero success was that in 1970 Rapanda Kaura and Joseph Karuaihe were regarded as so great a threat to SWAPO's leading role in the armed resistance that SWAPO worked towards their imprisonment in Tanzania.

Viewed realistically, there is little to be glorified about the movement though. The organisation of the escape was not adequately undertaken and the consequent stay in Botswana was characterised by misery and frustration. This can be seen as a last desperate attempt of the Ovaherero and Kerina to have a share in the liberation struggle, proving that without international recognition and support, little was possible. Neither the protectorate government nor the authorities in independent Botswana were willing to sup-

¹¹⁸ Motion on 154 War Veterans and Others by Hon. K. Kaura, 2.10.08

port the movement. Even if they were extremely hesitant in making any major decisions with regard to the Makunda issue, they realised that the whole project was a dubious undertaking and thus never attempted to deal with the situation in a way that would have brought them into conflict with either South Africa, or the international community.

9 Conclusion

The previous eight chapters have attempted to reflect critically on the various relevant areas in dealing with Botswana's role in the Namibian liberation struggle. We started by introducing different concepts of International Relations Theory in order to have a basis for the evaluation of notions of the degree of political freedom open to the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana in terms of their treatment of freedom fighters and refugees. It was presumed that South African dominance in the region compromised Botswana's room for manoeuvre, but that this did not mean the decision makers in Mafikeng and Gaborone were left without options. Further historical background, with particular emphasis on the Herero networks in Botswana, provided a context for the elaborations that followed. Before a thorough analysis of the relevance of Botswana for the Namibian liberation movements SWAPO and SWANU could take place, we focused on the institutional circumstances in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana, and on Botswana's bilateral relations and her role in the OAU and the UN Council for Namibia. This focus enabled us to see, firstly, how far the assumptions on Botswana's limited room for manoeuvre (already outlined) were actually reflected in policy-making and day-to-day politics. And, secondly, it was a necessary framework for an understanding of the restrictions and preconditions that Namibian freedom fighters and refugees faced whilst in Botswana.

Thereafter, it proved worthwhile to take a closer look at the actors on the Botswana side. In doing so the opportunities offered to the liberation movements became clearer, especially with regard to the Herero networks that SWAPO, SWANU and NUDO all utilised in one way or another. We could then focus on SWAPO, SWANU and NUDO as organisations in order to evaluate the role of Bechuanaland and Botswana as a valuable milestone in their endeavours. This thorough analysis provided the opportunity to reflect on Botswana's role in the Namibian liberation struggle and to place events at that time in the broader context of southern African politics, which follows in this final chapter.

This chapter provides an overview of the impact that Bechuanaland and Botswana had on the Namibian liberation struggle. Questions such as: How far was Botswana really of any help to Namibian refugees and freedom fighters? And what effect did Botswana have as a transit station on the Namibian fight for freedom? are addressed. The second section of this chapter deals with an assessment of how leaders in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana used their limited room for manoeuvre. In order to evaluate Botswana's contribution, a comparison with the situation in Mozambique and Malawi is drawn. Subsequently, the perspective will shift towards present-day politics with a brief outline

of current relations between Namibia and Botswana. More importantly, it will then be necessary to keep in mind the broader southern African perspective. This seems very important because the regional dimension of the liberation struggle was always known. Finally, a few closing remarks will conclude the chapter and the book.

The impact of the territory and its people

My aim has been to challenge the perception of Botswana as a black hole in the Namibian liberation struggle. Although geographically more closely linked to Namibia than any other of the Frontline States, it was always assumed that Botswana's contribution in terms of assistance was more or less negligible. In this sense, elaborating certain themes was an attempt to draw a more diverse and differentiated picture of Namibia's eastern neighbour with regard to its involvement in the Namibian liberation struggle. To make this study worthwhile, a broad understanding of the term "liberation struggle" was adopted. In this sense, we did not only regard the liberation struggle as the actual physical fighting that took place between units of SWAPO's liberation army PLAN and the South African Defence Force or other South and South West African military units in southern Angola and northern Namibia. The term "liberation struggle" encompassed all endeavours that contributed to full sovereignty and independence of Namibia, and to the functioning of the state today. It thereby included the Namibians' efforts to access further education abroad, as well as the endeavours of foreign governments directed at the liberation of Namibia. In this regard, Botswana's stance on the Namibia question, as has been shown when looking at her relations with the UN Council for Namibia and the Liberation Committee of the OAU, was of primary importance. Critics can, of course, argue that the impact of the whole liberation struggle is being exaggerated as, in the end, it was through negotiations in New York, without the participation of SWAPO, that Namibian independence came about. There is some truth to this argument, yet the ongoing efforts of SWAPO's guerrilla army, as well as the efforts of both SWAPO and SWANU in the diplomatic arena, certainly played their part in increasing international pressure. But since our definition of the liberation struggle is very broad, it is not necessary to discuss this problem in depth.

The question underlying the limited degree of political freedom and room for manoeuvre of both the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana was raised earlier on in this study. The autonomy of decision-making by leaders in the British colony, as well as in the independent republic, was subject to severe constraints. Nonetheless, the concept of interdependence was introduced in order to emphasize the degree of reciprocity in relations between Pretoria and Gaborone. As we will discuss later in this concluding chapter, this

was a useful approach. However, the category of power, identified as the most influential determinant in international politics by political realists, was central to the approach of officials in Botswana and the Bechuanaland Protectorate in handling the issues of the southern African liberation struggle and the consequent influx of refugees. Pressure and possible reactions from Pretoria were often taken into account before decisions were made, as I have illustrated by various examples.

Furthermore, I have explained how Namibian freedom fighters were able to draw on a substantial amount of support from the local population in Botswana, not least from the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu, whose ancestors had fled the German protectorate, South West Africa, after the war from 1904 to 1907. We have come to the conclusion that some of the support Namibian freedom fighters received from the Herero communities was vital, but also that it was marginal with regard to the total number of people that became active in one of the Namibian liberation movements. The fact that Ovaherero on both sides of the border had their share in the liberation struggle was a great morale boost. Although the support that liberation movements received on their way into exile and onto the battlefields was hardly evident during the struggle, the participation of the Ovaherero in Botswana adds, in retrospect, legitimacy to the objectives of the liberation struggle. If both Namibians in South West Africa and their relatives across the border followed the same goals, it must have been, regardless of what was made of it after independence, a just cause. The Ovaherero in Botswana, whose identity had been forged to a large extent by the eviction from their traditional territories in Namibia, can be regarded as a symbol of all the injustices that befell the Namibian people since the advent of the Germans. Their sympathy and interest places a special emphasis on the freedom fighters' determination and also on the moral wrong of the occupation of Namibia in violation of international law. Some of the conflicts among the freedom fighters, mainly the cleavage between Ovaherero and Ovambanderu, spilled over to Botswana, as we have seen when looking at the rivalries between the Namibian liberation movements.

Another morale boost was the sympathy with which the Namibian liberation movements, particularly SWAPO, were received by the opposition parties in Botswana. To a certain extent, this served to further legitimise the cause of the Namibian liberation movements, especially on the African continent where, most importantly, Matante's BPP with its pan-African focus (influenced by various pan-African congresses all over the continent) was looked at with considerable sympathy.

Interest in the actors of the Namibian liberation struggle directs a strong focus onto the activities of SWAPO and SWANU. From the activities of SWANU and SWAPO in the territory of Botswana, we learn that much depended on the personalities of the

respective leaders. Without any doubt, Maxton Joseph and Daniel Munamava had a great impact on the progression of SWAPO and SWANU in Botswana. Other representatives never reached the same degree of efficiency. The two men differed in that Munamava supported the Namibian liberation movement as a whole, whereas Maxton Joseph was an extremely loyal SWAPO member (although this did not mean he never supported anyone from SWANU). Without any doubt, Botswana was of strategic importance for both SWAPO and SWANU. This was not due to any active support the liberation movements received from Gaborone, but was rather a result of the inevitability of using its territory for those wanting to leave Namibia. In consequence, both SWAPO and SWANU established structures in Botswana, which were not only useful for simple transit, but also for the facilitation of communication and logistics.

Nevertheless, the general policy in both the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana not to allow military activity on its territory was a heavy burden. For SWANU, this policy was one of the factors that made all its military efforts fail. For SWAPO, it meant that a strategic retreat into Botswana was to be avoided. Besides, the option of establishing a military training camp in Botswana was hardly considered. Neither was infiltration into eastern Namibia ever considered by SWAPO. It remains highly speculative whether this would have proved efficient, taking into account that SWAPO was certainly more popular in the northern regions, where it eventually infiltrated its cadres, than in the Herero areas in eastern Namibia.

In the following sections we look at the impact of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana and make an attempt to evaluate the level of support that was given to or withheld from Namibian freedom fighters and refugees.

The Bechuanaland Protectorate

In many respects the way the British dealt with Namibian freedom fighters and refugees resembled their approach towards the development of their colony throughout the protectorate days. It was established initially that even in comparison to other British African colonies, Bechuanaland was treated with neglect and ignorance. Bechuanaland had been declared a British protectorate mainly for strategic reasons and development only took place where it was deemed absolutely necessary. With regard to the liberation struggle, one can observe that neglect and ignorance certainly played their part when British officials in the protectorate were confronted with the handling of the refugee and freedom fighter issue. The influx of refugees and freedom fighters, in our case from South West Africa, was only regarded as an issue when it compromised either the existing poor living standards of the people, or Britain's standing internationally or in her relations with South

Africa. This explains why, initially, when freedom fighters like Kozonguizi or Nujoma escaped from South West Africa through the Bechuanaland Protectorate, this was hardly an issue of note. At that stage, the British were unaware of the implications a larger influx from the west might have and, furthermore, even Pretoria had not yet realised that Bechuanaland was to become the major escape route for South West Africans on their way into exile. The British though would probably not even have had the means to guard against the influx of refugees. In her work on Swaziland, a British protectorate similar to Bechuanaland, Thula Simpson mentioned that Swaziland “lacked the resources to prevent the ANC from traversing the country clandestinely”.¹ In Bechuanaland this was no different, and more aggressive policies in the early 1960s might well not have worked.

As the influx of refugees in eastern Botswana (especially from South Africa) increased, both the British and South Africans began to realise that increasing numbers of South West Africans crossed the border as well. The British woke up to the fact that it was difficult to remain in a hesitant and neutral position with the rescue of Peter Katjavivi and his two colleagues in 1962, which undoubtedly acted as a provocation to Pretoria. A year later, the abduction of Kenneth Abrahams again revealed the differences between Britain and South Africa with regard to the events in South West Africa.

The handling of the Abrahams case made it clear that the British would not permanently opt for the course of confrontation. Secret communication with Pretoria became the order of the day in delicate issues. The Makunda issue was a case in point. It illustrated that the well-being of the refugees was not the British primary source of concern. When the refugees arrived in Makunda, the British aimed at solving the case with the least possible damage and not necessarily in the interests of the Ovaherero. The reluctant stance on the activities of welfare organisations further reflected the British approach.

It is understandable that the British in the Bechuanaland Protectorate did not take a proactive stance in the southern African liberation struggle. They were well aware of the vulnerability of the territory, and when it became clear that Botswana was about to get her independence, there was no need to get too involved in conflicts such as the Namibian quest for freedom. Certainly, relations with South Africa had long since cooled following the rise to power of the National Party in 1948. Recalling Jack Halpern’s description of Bechuanaland as a “hostage” of South Africa,² the British degree of political freedom constrained its free decision-making with regard to the liberation movements.

On a personal level, the British were more sympathetic to the Namibian freedom fighters. One may recall the relationship between Ben Amathila and the District Commissioner

¹ Simpson 2009: p. 28

² Halpern 1965

of Ghanzi³ or the frequent meetings between the District Commissioner of Francistown and SWAPO's first representative in Francistown, Maxton Joseph.⁴ Furthermore, there is no doubt that refugees and freedom fighters from South West Africa benefited from the relatively lax attitude of the British. As long as they did not arouse too much public attention they were granted certain liberties. In this way, both SWANU and SWAPO managed to utilise the territory of Bechuanaland efficiently and derived some advantages, mainly logistically, which was essential in the early days of the struggle when most territories in the area were still under colonial rule.

We have noted initially that, when analysing power relations, the power of negotiating should be taken into account. In a number of instances, communication between the British, especially the representatives in Cape Town and Mafikeng, and South Africa proved crucial when dealing with conflicts. The cautious British handling of the abduction of the Kenneth Abrahams group contributed to South Africa's response, which was more responsible than in other cases. Material power is always a strong argument in negotiations and, in this regard, the British had little to offer in their underdeveloped protectorate, where they were unable to control all immigration movements that took place.

Most importantly, there was no overall strategy with which protectorate officials approached the increasing influx of refugees and freedom fighters. Admittedly, it was only in the dying days of the protectorate that the first refugee legislation was introduced. In many cases, British helplessness became evident. The British had a liberal outlook, but the responsibility that they finally started to feel for the territory and its people at the end of their rule in Bechuanaland alienated the liberation movements and the refugees; freedom fighters could never be quite sure what to expect from the protectorate government. Most of the time though, Bechuanaland remained a relatively trouble-free territory to cross for both Namibian liberation movements.

Botswana

Finding lasting solutions to the presence of the southern African liberation movements and refugees was indeed a thankless task that the government of Botswana inherited from the British. At least a legal basis was put into place soon after independence when parliament passed the Refugee Recognition and Control Act in 1967, which had already been worked on during the late protectorate days with the involvement of members of the Executive Council who were now in government. Yet, as we have seen, Botswana managed to develop her own position throughout the years of the liberation struggle without

³ Cf. Interview with Ben Amathila, 6.8.08

⁴ Cf. Interview with Philipp Steenkamp, 20.9.08

having to constantly fear South African retaliation and without being seen as a vassal of Pretoria as, for example, Malawi was continuously being accused of.

Recollecting Vincent Khapoya's five factors in determining the level of support the liberation movements could receive from a certain African country, we have to assert that out of the five criteria the geographical position was the most crucial factor. This position resulted in Botswana's geopolitical dependence on South Africa and hence had a considerable impact on the way Botswana handled the liberation movements. It is clear though that Khapoya's factors lack the means to explain the activities of the Namibian liberation movements on the territory of Botswana as they only refer to the national level whereas, as we have seen particularly in the case of the Ovaherero in Botswana, informal structures played a very important role as well.

This was, however, not due to a lack of effective sovereignty of the state of Botswana. Initially, some criteria were listed that served as a basis for the evaluation of the ability of the state of Botswana to perform its basic duties with regard to the handling of freedom fighters and refugees. As indicated at that stage, one cannot (despite occasional border violations from South Africa and Rhodesia) deny the Botswana government the sovereignty over her territory. Over the years, Botswana increased her independence from outside influences when making decisions with regard to the liberation struggle in the neighbouring territories and thus gained what Jackson would have termed "positive sovereignty"⁵ – the competence to exercise leadership in her territory.

For a long time Botswana relied greatly on aid organisations in order to meet the demands on the state from the welfare sector. As we have seen, this was taken advantage of by the Namibian liberation movements. SWAPO's representative Lucky Shoopala was a good example. However, it would be unfair to blame deficiencies in the welfare, or even in the security sector on the Botswana government, that simply had to make do with what it inherited from the British.

The assumption that Botswana's path towards more independent decision-making, with regard to the handling of the liberation movements, would be facilitated by developments in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe undoubtedly proved to be true. In general, the number of refugees from these territories decreased dramatically with their independence. Furthermore, the opening up of the Angola option for SWAPO members on their way into exile and the diminishing pressure from the eastern flank with the independence of Zimbabwe removed a great burden from Botswana. Yet, this did not automatically result in more liberal conditions for the remaining freedom fighters. For SWAPO members, the importance of Namibia's eastern neighbour had declined, but

⁵ Cf. Jackson 1990: p. 29

SWANU members continued to face hardships in Botswana for reasons, as has been argued before, beyond the control of the Botswana government.

There was never the slightest doubt that Botswana would not, at any stage of the liberation struggle in the neighbouring territories, soften her policies on the activities of the liberation movements. On the contrary, the clause to abstain from both military activities and politics on the territory of Botswana was universally accepted by government and opposition parties, as well as liberation movements.⁶ Needless to say, the “no violence” policy could not be given up mainly owing to South African pressure. In this respect, the eventual establishment of an army in 1977 was a confession that certain investments in issues of “high politics” had to be made to guarantee the well-being of the country (although the BDF was mainly a reaction to Rhodesian insurgencies at the time and not necessarily to South African intimidation). David Vital had suggested an active emancipatory strategy for those countries that were considered to be weak due to dependence on regional hegemons or superpowers.⁷ In the case of Botswana, a re-orientation of its outward policy certainly took place, most notably with her engagement in the Frontline States Movement. Yet, this engagement did not give her the freedom to neglect the South African factor altogether.

This does not mean that neo-institutional or neo-liberal approaches like the one of Keohane and Nye should be completely disregarded when looking at Botswana’s position with regard to the liberation struggle in the surrounding territories. A strong interdependence between Botswana and South Africa was undoubtedly identifiable, though with Botswana not only being more sensitive but also more vulnerable than her southern neighbour.⁸ Pretoria became increasingly aware of the potential threat that could emanate from the territory of Botswana. John Vorster had called it a “corridor for saboteurs”.⁹ This was a dramatisation, but it emphasized the South African perception that the presence of virtually all southern African liberation movements in Botswana could, despite their adherence to the non-violence condition, affect South Africa badly.

Summing up, one can conclude that Botswana found its own path in the handling of refugees and freedom fighters. Still, there was a lot of uncertainty involved, mainly due to a more liberal practical approach than that provided for by the legislation. This is exemplified by the accommodating decisions that were made in the Office of the President concerning the requests for political asylum once the Refugee Advisory Committees

⁶ The SWAPO cases mentioned in chapter 7 and the preparations of the SWANU Revolutionary Council cannot really count as a turning away from the policy.

⁷ Cf. Chapter 1: Criteria for a well-founded analysis, p. 12

⁸ Cf. Chapter 1: Criteria for a well-founded analysis, p. 13

⁹ Cf. Chapter 8: British reaction, p. 191

had been established. Admittedly, liberation movements such as SWAPO and SWANU faced setbacks in Botswana and also ran into conflict with the authorities. The authorities always left room for manoeuvre as long as Botswana did not have to deal with substantial security fears. The adherence to the policy that strictly prohibited the use of force or any military activity, certainly established some kind of mutual trust between the government and the liberation movements. In this respect, it was always clear to the freedom fighters what was definitely *not* allowed whereas, in other instances, especially when former refugees wanted to return to Botswana from exile and were then declared prohibited immigrants, the treatment undoubtedly had a more unsettling character for the liberation movements.

This was a continuation of British policy. In many ways the Botswana government continued to handle the freedom fighters in a similar way. Having had a close look at what was possible for SWAPO, SWANU and NUDO to achieve in Botswana, the observation has to be made that substantial numbers of refugees and prospective freedom fighters from Namibia escaped through Botswana. Despite detention and bureaucratic processes, authorities in Botswana did not put too much of a spoke in their wheel. This applied as well to the activities of the SWAPO representative in Francistown, the most important logistical and propaganda contact during the Namibian liberation struggle in Botswana.

Other countries, especially the other Frontline States, were able to do more. But if one thinks of a country such as Banda's Malawi a much stronger reaction to the influx of freedom fighters could have been conceivable. The following subsection deals with action alternatives. In this vein, Botswana's contribution becomes clearer.

Action alternatives

A number of southern African countries faced similar constraints when they became independent. As already mentioned, Swaziland and Lesotho were often analysed together with Botswana. These two monarchies were, however, more closely intertwined with South Africa. In order to look at alternative solutions to the problems that were created by the liberation struggle in the surrounding territories, we now briefly focus on Malawi and Mozambique. Their policies can be perceived as being at opposite ends of the spectrum of feasible approaches. A comparison with the strategies adopted by the governments in Lilongwe and Maputo respectively serves the purpose of highlighting the fact that the policies adopted by rulers in the protectorate and the Republic alike were modest and well considered. Admittedly, in some respects comparing the approaches of the three countries

may be skewed due to the different conditions and constraints each country faced. The above-mentioned reasons, however, make it worthwhile to reflect briefly on the challenges and approaches in these territories.

Mozambique

In contrast to Botswana, Mozambique only became independent in 1975 after a protracted liberation struggle. Up to independence, Mozambique was ruled by the Portuguese, one of the few allies of apartheid South Africa. Power relations in southern Africa then changed considerably with the Portuguese departure. Suddenly, Mozambique was no longer a territory from where freedom fighters sought asylum and where (South African) military bases were established, but rather a host to the liberation movements from other countries. Robert Mugabe's ZANU (Zimbabwe Africa National Union), in particular, made use of the mountainous terrain of the highlands in western Mozambique from where it launched attacks on the Rhodesian regime.¹⁰ The Rhodesian secret service was well aware of that and consequently set up a military organisation that was meant to destabilise Mozambique and her FRELIMO government: RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana). The activities of RENAMO seriously destabilised the fragile new state (although the RENAMO attacks on crucial parts of Mozambican infrastructure only intensified when the organisation was no longer remote-controlled by the Rhodesians).¹¹

After Zimbabwean independence and the simultaneous loss of support from Rhodesia, RENAMO was taken under South Africa's wing. Pretoria became aware that soon after independence Mozambique began to host ANC guerrillas. The room for manoeuvre the ANC enjoyed in Maputo was that attacks on targets in South Africa could now be carefully planned.¹² Although the Mozambican government increased the pressure on the ANC with the soaring intimidation from Pretoria, ANC guerrillas still found ways and means of entering South Africa from Mozambique via Swaziland.¹³

The support for RENAMO was, however, only one measure the South African regime took to destabilise its north-eastern neighbour. By decreasing its traffic through the port of Maputo and by reducing the numbers of Mozambican workers on South African mines, Pretoria put heavy economic pressure on Mozambique.¹⁴ Partly because of the South African destabilisation strategy, Mozambique's economy was in a desperate shape by 1983. Furthermore, the country suffered from vicious South African raids, mainly

¹⁰ Cf. Meredith 2008: pp. 5 ff.

¹¹ Cf. Vines 1991: pp. 15–17

¹² Cf. Hall/Young 1997: pp. 121 ff.

¹³ Cf. Simpson 2009: p. 10

¹⁴ Cf. Finnegan 1993: p. 32

on the capital. Whenever South Africa assumed that an ANC attack had been plotted in Mozambique, she immediately sought revenge.

Some ANC strikes had been plotted by ANC cadres in Mozambique, most notably the attacks on the Sasol facilities (1.6.80), on the Voortrekkerhoogte in Pretoria (12.8.81) and the car bomb explosion outside the South African Air Force headquarters (20.5.83). The South African reaction was swift. A South African raid on Maputo on 30 January 1981 killing 14, among them one of those involved in the attack on the Sasol facilities, was seen as a direct response to the Sasol strike. The South Africans also demonstrated their air power with an air raid on Maputo three days after the car bomb explosion in 1983, leaving six people dead and 40 injured. Numerous other South African offences were carried out in order to force the Mozambican government to cease its support for the ANC.¹⁵

The South African destabilisation strategy finally coerced Mozambique into signing a non-aggression pact with Pretoria in 1984.¹⁶ Mozambique was left, due to the state of destruction of the country, with no alternative. South Africa never adhered to her promise to stop support for RENAMO and Mozambique continued to suffer from South African destabilisation. Her policy of overt support for ZANU and the ANC had not paid off.

It would be unfair to blame the decline of the Mozambican economy solely on failed policy choices with regard to the liberation struggle in the neighbouring countries, and a detailed analysis of Mozambique's challenges in the first decade after independence would need to be dealt with elsewhere. By the time Mozambique became independent, her people were already traumatised by a ten-year-long guerrilla war against the Portuguese. Besides, in contrast to Botswana, Mozambique was not able to benefit from any substantial mineral deposits and thus struggled to decrease her economic dependence on South Africa. The Mozambican government also failed in other areas. It neglected traditional authorities, and the policies of nationalisation largely contributed to economic collapse.¹⁷ This led to the growing unpopularity of FRELIMO and hence created a base for RENAMO. The population of Botswana, however, ethnically more heterogeneous than the one in Mozambique, stood firmly behind the Khama government – a fact that, as has been established earlier on, would have allowed Seretse Khama to accept the temporary suffering of his people had it been in the interest of a greater cause.¹⁸

Nonetheless, the activities of RENAMO posed the most destructive factor in the economic decline of Mozambique. Overwhelmed by the newly gained freedom in 1975, the

¹⁵ Cf. Hanlon 1986a: p. 65 and Hall/Young: pp. 123–124

¹⁶ Cf. Finnegan 1993: p. 34

¹⁷ Cf. Hanlon 1991: pp. 11–12

¹⁸ Cf. Chapter 4: Pressure from South Africa and Botswana's reaction, p. 76 ff.

Mozambican government had opted to live out its enthusiasm for pan-African responsibility, but to an extent that proved to be unviable.

Malawi

Unlike Mozambique and almost comparable to Botswana, Malawi's transition to independence was fairly smooth. A few weeks after independence in 1964, disunity in the first cabinet became apparent, which led to the dismissal of several ministers by President Hastings Banda. In the aftermath of the cabinet crisis, Banda increased his leverage and was left with government ministers who were more accommodating towards South Africa than the more radical government members who had been fired.¹⁹ Indeed, Malawi developed a friendly relationship with Pretoria, which was unique for an independent African country at that time. Other factors that influenced Malawi's orientation towards South Africa were the country's development needs, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Rhodesia and the short-term failure of the various southern African guerrilla movements.²⁰ President Banda argued that the presence of guerrilla movements on Malawi's territory would be to the detriment of the economy and, as he regarded economic independence as the most important objective of a head of state, he adopted a very pragmatic approach towards South Africa.²¹

As early as 1966 Malawi and South Africa agreed on an extradition treaty.²² Malawi received a substantial amount of aid from South Africa in order to finance infrastructure projects such as the building of the new capital, Lilongwe (a project the British had refused to finance), and the railway line to the Mozambican port of Nacala.²³ After a state visit of the South African Prime Minister, Vorster, to Malawi in May 1970 and Banda's return visit to South Africa a year later, the two countries finally exchanged ambassadors in 1974.²⁴ In the course of the policy of *détente*, Pretoria approached other African states and sparked dialogue with them, but Malawi was the rare exception: a country that co-operated with South Africa right from its independence.

Malawi never had to fear any South African raids. She neither became a host to refugees, nor did refugees pass through her territory on their way into exile. Actually, as has been pointed out by McMaster, the long-term benefits of the co-operation that South Africa and Malawi were hoping for were contradictory, at least if one believed the public

¹⁹ Cf. Kaunda 1992: p. 61

²⁰ Cf. McMaster 1974: p. 89

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*: p. 90 and L'Hoiry 1988: p. 181

²² Cf. L'Hoiry 1988: p. 190

²³ Cf. McMaster 1974: pp. 89 and 102

²⁴ Cf. McMaster 1974: p. 105 and L'Hoiry: p. 190

declarations of the two governments. Banda argued that his policy of dialogue was the only suitable path that could detract Pretoria from its apartheid philosophy, whereas South Africa believed that by co-operating with Malawi, it could show the world that it was not such a harsh state because there was a country, even in Africa, that was willing to work together with her. In this way, she hoped to further strengthen her position and that of the apartheid state.²⁵ Undoubtedly, economic benefits were Malawi's principal objective of the closeness to South Africa.

Banda's South Africa policy made Malawi a social outcast on the African continent. Relations with Tanzania and Zambia, two countries that were overtly supportive of the liberation movements, were antagonistic towards Malawi in the 1960s and took a long time to repair. Shortly after the formation of the African Liberation Committee, it was proposed that Malawi should join. Tanzania's President Nyerere, however, threatened to leave the committee if Malawi joined. Consequently, Malawi retreated. Besides, Banda constantly accused Zambia and Tanzania of harbouring Malawian dissidents. While reconciliation between Malawi and Zambia was proclaimed during a state visit of Zambia's President Kaunda in Malawi in 1974, tensions between Malawi and Tanzania only eased in the 1980s.²⁶ Due to her negative approach towards FRELIMO, Malawian-Mozambican relations got off to a bad footing when Mozambique became independent in 1975. When Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, Banda was forced to realise that his South Africa-friendly approach had left Malawi increasingly isolated in the region.²⁷ The costs of her good relations with South Africa now outweighed the benefits. Over the years Malawi's collaboration with Pretoria had led to a great loss of reputation. Admittedly, a good reputation is worth little if a country is suffering economically, but even the co-operation with South Africa did not prevent Malawi from remaining poor and largely underdeveloped. When the Frontline States merged into the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), the forerunner of SADC, in 1980, Malawi became a founding member.²⁸

In terms of Malawi's geopolitical situation, one would have assumed that she had a substantial degree of political freedom, at least larger than Botswana's. She did not border the South African hegemon and she shared frontiers with the independent countries, Zambia and Tanzania. Yet, Hastings Banda opted for the path of collaboration with the primary enemy of all independent African countries. He accused Zambia and Tanzania

²⁵ Cf. McMaster 1974: p. 109

²⁶ Cf. L'Hoiry 1988: pp. 186–189

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*: p. 192

²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*: p. 193

of hypocrisy because they also consumed South African products.²⁹ On the other hand, these countries did, at least, not shy away from publicly taking a clear stance against South Africa. Finally, Malawi's policy shift in 1980 was a tacit admission that, in many respects, the philosophy of seeking dialogue with South Africa via economic cooperation was a dead end.

The example of Malawi also shows that power relations, as proclaimed by political realists, sometimes played only a moderate role in the regional set-up. Malawi was certainly more influenced by economic and political opportunism than by any pressure exerted by Pretoria.

Botswana's approach in light of the presented alternatives

The examples offered by Mozambique and Malawi did not intend to closely analyse the policies of these two countries. The author is well aware that the comparability of these two cases is limited, partly because they do not refer to exactly the same time period. The two countries faced different conditions in domestic politics and the constitution of the respective population varied in each case. Nonetheless, the two alternative approaches depicted above, clearly highlight Botswana's discrepancies and particularities in her approach towards the handling of the liberation movements and ultimately her policies concerning South Africa. It becomes apparent that Botswana struck a balance between overt support for the liberation movements and total hostility towards South Africa and the strict refusal of any involvement in the issues facing the liberation movements and direct collaboration with South Africa.

Of course, politicians in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana were equally being criticised for not doing enough to support the southern African liberation movements. Many African countries expected Botswana to take a more active stance against Portugal, Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa. But considering how much Mozambique suffered from the creation of RENAMO and from numerous destabilising attacks, it seems likely that had Botswana followed this path, it would have had to face more retaliatory action from South Africa than the two destructive raids on Gaborone in 1985 and 1986. On the other hand, it was not necessary for Botswana to develop as close a relationship with South Africa as Malawi did and thereby harm her ties with other African countries.

I argue that the middle course leaders in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana followed was a wise choice that guaranteed maximum success for Namibian freedom fighters and refugees. It was always clear that military and political agitation were not

²⁹ Cf. McMaster 1974: p. 99

options open to the liberation movements. This was clearly communicated to Pretoria and, although South Africa constantly cautioned against Botswana's co-operation with the liberation movements in public, she evidently believed that Botswana did not provide a base for the guerrilla armies of the liberation movements. In this way, the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana enabled the Namibian freedom fighters to cross their territory without considerable difficulty, which was an absolute necessity until Angola became independent. Thirdly, the policy of occasionally turning a blind eye on missions of leading SWAPO and SWANU representatives, primarily in the 1960s, facilitated communication within both SWAPO and SWANU. The extent to which Kozonguizi's and Nujoma's visits to Bechuanaland in 1964 actually influenced the liberation struggle remains open to question, but the presidents of the two Namibian liberation movements undoubtedly enforced mobilisation for the Namibian cause in the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Current relations between Namibia and Botswana

Reflection on the current political relations between Namibia and Botswana raises the question whether Botswana's stance on the liberation struggle had an impact on the bilateral relationship of the two countries today. In both Namibia and Botswana the current governments consist of only one party: SWAPO and the BDP respectively. One might assume that the current Namibian government is thankful to Botswana for the support during the liberation struggle. It is also possible that there are tensions between SWAPO and the BDP and, consequently, between the two governments because SWAPO was much closer to Botswana's opposition parties during the time of the liberation struggle, and the "no violence" condition might have been regarded as too stringent by SWAPO.

This brief depiction is, of course, by no means a thorough analysis of the relations between Namibia and Botswana and, in order to estimate the impact of the liberation struggle on the current relations, further research would be necessary. Yet it is noticeable that public communication between the two governments avoids any reference to strained relations during the time of Namibia's fight for freedom. This differs from the rhetoric witnessed in Namibian discussions with countries that are governed by former liberation movements such as Zimbabwe, South Africa or Mozambique. One could therefore assume that there are underlying tensions as a result of ideological differences during the liberation struggle and Botswana's refusal to grant more overt support.

Generally, however, relations between Namibia and Botswana can be described as “cordial”³⁰ though not without friction since Namibian independence. This friction was, at least at first glance, not caused by tensions resulting from the liberation struggle. In the last twenty years three conflictive issues were dominant in Namibian–Botswana relations. The most prominent of these being the border dispute on the Kasikili/Sedudu Island in the Chobe River. Botswana had occupied the island a year after Namibian independence. Namibia also laid claim to the territory until the International Court of Justice finally decided in Botswana’s favour in 1999. Namibia then accepted the court ruling.³¹

The attempted secession of the Caprivians in 1998 provided another source of discontent. Up until the end of 1998, almost 2,500 civilians fled across the border into Botswana. Initially, Botswana did not grant the refugees official refugee status, but President Festus Mogae refused to extradite the secessionists.³² In 2005 the two governments finally settled on an agreement that provided for the departure of prominent dissidents from Botswana to a third country.³³

Namibia and Botswana followed different approaches concerning controversial issues among member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the successor organisation to the Frontline States. While Namibia, together with Angola and Zimbabwe, decided to send forces to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Botswana abstained and sided with South Africa, preferring to solve the conflict in the DRC by diplomatic means.³⁴ Again in recent years, when the crisis in Zimbabwe escalated, Botswana and Namibia strongly disagreed on how to solve the matter. Namibia was supportive of the South African idea of quiet diplomacy, whereas Botswana was one of the few African countries to openly criticise Mugabe and the Zimbabwean government.³⁵ While the former conflict created a rift within SADC, the approach to the latter issue can, at least partly, be traced back to the days of the liberation struggle. It is striking how those countries, where former liberation movements now run the government, show some kind of quiet solidarity with the ZANU–PF government, which has its roots in the liberation struggle. By contrast, Seretse Ian Khama, the current President of Botswana, whose country had become independent much earlier, does not see the necessity of remaining silent

³⁰ Cf. ISS, http://www.issafrica.org/index.php?link_id=14&mlink_id=5166&link_type=12&mlink_type=12&tmpl_id=3 (22.6.09)

³¹ Cf. Schoeman 2002: p. 211

³² Cf. ISS, http://www.issafrica.org/index.php?link_id=14&mlink_id=5166&link_type=12&mlink_type=12&tmpl_id=3 (22.6.09) and Dierks

³³ Cf. ISS, http://www.issafrica.org/index.php?link_id=14&mlink_id=5166&link_type=12&mlink_type=12&tmpl_id=3 (22.6.09)

³⁴ Cf. Johnson 2008: p. 88

³⁵ Cf. New Era, 5.12.08

about the developments in Zimbabwe. Namibia's and Botswana's differing approaches concerning the Zimbabwe issue can, however, not be ascribed to any antagonism between the two countries, but rather reflect distinct political cultures that have been shaped by historic developments in the respective countries.

These three issues did not, however, spoil the good relationship between Botswana and Namibia. Former President Masire emphasized that once the conflict over the island in the Chobe River was resolved, "the Namibians became good neighbours."³⁶ Masire had been the first head of state to pay a state visit to Namibia after independence. In his autobiography he highlighted that his government was in no way interested in the DTA, or any of the other South African puppets winning the first Namibian elections. This is why the Botswana government allegedly supported SWAPO in the 1989 election campaign with the donation of some vehicles and with advice on how to run an election campaign.³⁷

Both Namibia and Botswana are members of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the very organisation which goes back to 1910 and, of course, the SADC and generally co-operate well. This is best documented by their collaboration in regional infrastructure projects such as the Trans-Kalahari Highway (inaugurated in 1998), connecting the Namibian coast with Mozambique via Botswana and South Africa.³⁸ On 5 June 2009 Botswana and Namibia signed an agreement allowing the construction of a railway line between Botswana and Walvis Bay for the transport of coal, soda ash, salt and mining machinery. This will certainly contribute to the rapprochement of the two countries.³⁹ Recalling the ideas of Khama and Masire three decades ago, the railway line can be seen as a revival of the plans Botswana harboured in the 1970s.⁴⁰

Geographic conditions provide an inevitable link between Namibia and Botswana. This has been a feature since the early days of the liberation struggle and it remains so today for the governments in Windhoek and Gaborone to seek further co-operation to exploit geographic conditions. At first sight, it looks as if the two countries are prepared to face this challenge.

The overall relevance of this book

Botswana has always been conceived as some kind of a "black box" in the southern African liberation struggle. Having become independent in a smooth transition period, a

³⁶ Masire 2006: p. 286

³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*: p. 285

³⁸ Cf. Xinhua News Agency, 20.3.98

³⁹ Cf. Mmegi, 5.6.09

⁴⁰ Cf. Chapter 4: UN Council for Namibia, p. 75 f.

nucleus of armed resistance never developed. Botswana was never the scene of any armed struggle; but remained an oasis of peace throughout her existence. It has often been mentioned that Botswana served as a transit station for freedom fighters from Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe or Mozambique, but the sequence remained largely unclear. It seemed obvious that Namibians, for example, had to get to Botswana on their way into exile, but events actually taking place in Bechuanaland or Botswana were never really questioned. At least for the Namibian case this “black box” has been decoded through the thorough study of the activities of the Namibian liberation movements on Botswana’s territory. Major actors and places have been identified and their relevance has been made evident in this work. This gave important insights into the functioning of SWAPO and SWANU and the way (would-be) freedom fighters and refugees perceived their role in the Namibian struggle for independence.

The availability of new material, mainly through the accessibility of archival sources, but also through oral history sources enables researchers to amplify the focus on the liberation struggles.⁴¹ In most countries the former liberation movements that are now in power claim the exclusive right to define history and more especially to assess occurrences of the liberation struggle. Henning Melber has, for example, looked critically at these developments and come to the conclusion that the liberation movements in power are often glorified as the “end of history”, and all those who oppose them are regarded as part of an imperialist conspiracy.⁴² The critical researcher has to constantly try and move away from the image of the liberation struggle as presented by the ruling former liberation movements. In this sense I have aimed to depict other aspects of the liberation struggle, which do not necessarily centre on SWAPO, but that reflect various occurrences throughout the liberation struggle and so highlight the contribution of other actors.

In contrast to most other countries, both in the region and on the continent, Botswana has been praised for her generally good governance. It is said that she stands out as an example of liberal democracy. Without analysing this statement in depth, one can establish that in the countries surrounding Botswana, where independence was gained after a protracted liberation struggle, the former liberation movements still hold firmly onto power and often lack democratic attitudes. More importantly, the members of the ruling BDP were never part of the network of the southern African liberation movements that still seem to be fairly closely linked to one another. In this regard they do not feel bound to show unnecessary forms of respect in cases where they differ from those governments on political issues. The BDP never belonged to the southern African power elites, but, as

⁴¹ Cf. Sapire 2009: p. 271

⁴² Melber 2008

we have seen, always chose to walk its own path. With regard to the liberation struggle, Botswana's attitude can be seen as having formed the basis of reasonably independent policy-making in current politics from the earlier years up until the present time.

This book was also about exile politics in a very delicate environment. Looking at the activities of the various southern African liberation movements, one could characterise them mainly as exile movements. It is, therefore, necessary to look more deeply into the relations between the liberation movements and their host countries. It was certainly true for the South African and Namibian liberation movements that their place of exile was of special importance because there was not much room for manoeuvre in their respective countries. Research on the activities of these liberation movements is therefore essential to the comprehension of the liberation struggle in the cases of Namibia and South Africa. With regard to Namibia, the focus has, so far, been on the first days in exile in Tanzania.⁴³ This is why the topic of Botswana fits neatly into the broader picture of Namibian exile politics. All major decisions were taken in exile though not necessarily in Botswana. The structures of SWAPO and SWANU in exile in Botswana vividly complement what is known about the exile activities of the Namibian freedom fighters, especially SWAPO's preparations for the armed struggle.

The liberation struggle in southern Africa was not only a national phenomenon, but one that involved the region as a whole. On the one hand, the liberation movements made use of neighbouring countries as places of refuge, as transit stations, or even to prepare guerrilla activities thereby involving countries like Botswana or Zambia that had already become independent in a more or less peaceful way. On the other hand, developments in southern Africa between 1960 and 1990 can be seen as an ongoing process towards eventual sovereignty that finally led to the belated independence of all southern African countries. The relevance of cross-border processes makes it indeed inevitable to focus on the region of southern Africa in future research. The SADC project on the liberation struggle, which started in 2005,⁴⁴ seems to be a good starting point for that. Individual researchers such as Christian Williams who focuses on SWAPO's exile situation in Angola⁴⁵ also contributes a great deal to overcoming national boundaries in the analysis of the phenomenon of the liberation struggle, as well as of other political occurrences. In her introduction to a special issue on the liberation struggles, exile and international solidarity of the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Hilary Sapire acknowledges that, with regard to the liberation struggle, this broader regional dimension deserves special attention.

⁴³ Cf. Early works published still during the liberation struggle such as Ansprenger 1984 or Harneit-Sievers 1985

⁴⁴ See Introduction, p. XV

⁴⁵ Cf. Williams 2009

She writes that one should recognise the “extent to which liberation struggles across the subcontinent were intertwined in a complicated and, at times, ambiguous fashion.”⁴⁶

As increasing public attention is focused on the activities of SADC, for example, its involvement in the Congo conflict or its negotiations in Zimbabwe, southern Africa is increasingly perceived as a distinct region. Perhaps this was also the case during the time of the liberation struggle, but then a clear division existed between those states that had already been liberated and those that were still governed by a white minority regime or from the colonial metropolis. With the perception of southern Africa as a region, awareness is raised that the research focus in various disciplines of social sciences (in particular in history and political science), should not stop at the borders of the nation state.

In southern Africa today one can detect two powers that are able to play a major role on the continent: South Africa and Angola. The question remains: What about the other countries such as Botswana and Namibia? Their dependence on countries like South Africa can only be reduced through regional or bilateral co-operation as is planned with the railway-line between Walvis Bay and Botswana. In doing so, it is important and necessary to recollect the links of the past, which are undoubtedly there, as I have attempted to demonstrate. Although it is impossible to call Botswana’s role in the Namibian liberation struggle a bilateral co-operation with Namibia, it has become apparent that there was a great deal of sympathy between the two peoples and that people from both countries somehow interacted (within the given constraints) to mutual benefit.

Final remarks

“In politics, nothing moves unless it’s pushed.”⁴⁷ With this statement the American Republican Party activist Morton C. Blackwell made an attempt to express the common knowledge that overcoming idleness is one of the essentials in striving for political change. With regard to the Namibian liberation struggle, we may presume that without the determination of the liberation movements, first and foremost SWAPO, independence would not have been achieved in the same way as it eventually occurred. But “pushing” can be perilous, which is why officials in both the Bechuanaland Protectorate and in Botswana adopted a more prudent approach in the handling of Namibian freedom fighters and refugees on their territory. Nonetheless, as we have seen, this still served the purpose well, even better than if the “pushing” had been stronger.

⁴⁶ Sapire 2009: p. 286

⁴⁷ <http://www.progress.org/maxim02.htm> (20.7.09)

From the foregone analysis two main theses emerge. Firstly, the policy of turning a “blind eye” to the activities of the liberation movements greatly helped Namibian freedom fighters on their way into exile. With few exceptions, they adhered to the restrictions and were thus allowed to move around relatively freely. The maintenance of the SWAPO office in Francistown throughout the liberation struggle is a case in point. Secondly, the feeling of togetherness between the Ovaherero on both sides of the Botswana–Namibian border considerably facilitated the realisation of the plans of both SWANU and SWAPO. The liberation struggle was eventually dominated by the Ovambo, but the involvement of Botswana’s Ovaherero and Ovambanderu in both SWAPO and SWANU gave the government in Gaborone the impression that the struggle was in fact for a Namibian cause.

This study had its main focus on the microstructures in Botswana. Microstructures, in this case, refer to structures below national level and include all the support that the liberation movements received from the local population as well as to the freedom fighters’ activities; whereas macrostructures concern the interaction between the liberation movements and the Botswana government as well as Gaborone’s diplomatic efforts in the Namibia case. The author believes that microstructures played a far greater role for Namibian freedom fighters and refugees, and hence the emphasis of my analysis.

With regard to the macrostructures, a focal point could be Botswana’s co-operation within SADCC in the 1980s in finding a solution to the Namibian crisis. It is apparent though that Botswana did not play a leading role in this process, and the eventual turn of events with the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola and the negotiations that led to the New York Accords is well known. This might make the choice of an International Relations approach in this book less obvious. However, the policies introduced in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana, as well as the attitude of the respective officials towards the handling of this delicate issue that developed from these policies, were a clear result of the conceptions that were derived from the country’s position in international politics and its standing in southern Africa in particular.

Apart from research in a broader southern African context, further research will be necessary in two areas: firstly, in areas in which more critical issues of the Namibian liberation struggle are to be explored. Regarding Botswana this applies, for example, to the case of Lucky Shoopala, whose alleged contacts to South African agents can neither be proven nor falsified. Nonetheless, these allegations landed him in prison. Another case is the rumour about Ambrose Kandji’s betrayal of the Makunda refugee group. The elaborations above have attempted to logically invalidate this thesis. But some questions could be solved more easily if public access to the SWAPO Archives were possible. In the case

of Shoopala, SWAPO would probably argue that his case is without any relevance for present-day politics and include it in its general strategy of refusing to talk about what it calls arbitrary allegations.

Secondly, there is a great lack of research on the Botswana side. Historic works on Botswana mainly focus on Botswana's economic success story and the successes of the BDP. During my research, it has become more than apparent that little has been written on the opposition parties in Botswana, neither in the past, nor currently. Better understanding of the functioning of the opposition parties in Botswana would, however, serve to explain the deficiencies of Botswana's democracy. Yet, this was not exactly what this book was concerned with. More closely linked to the topic of this book is Botswana's role in international politics. This thesis has named some of the constraints that Botswana faced and, to some extent, still faces when acting in the international arena. Nonetheless, its position in an ever increasing globalised world deserves further attention, especially with regard to the role of maverick that Gaborone seems to adopt on the African continent, both in relation to the Zimbabwe crisis and the International Criminal Court (ICC) order to arrest the Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir.

In conclusion, the argument that the role of Botswana in the Namibian liberation struggle was without impact on current politics cannot be sustained. Kazenambo Kazenambo, Mbeuta ua-Ndjarakana and Moses Ndjarakana who were all born in Botswana and now hold important offices in Namibia are the most vivid examples. This book has drawn a comprehensive image of Botswana's situation and the way she was affected by the developments across the western border. Not only was Botswana affected by the Namibian liberation struggle, her geographical position placed her in a position to influence events in Namibia. Conceivable action alternatives would have ranged between a complete boycott of all liberation activities (which would have been possible only with the acceptance of South African security personnel on Botswana's territory) and unconditional assistance towards the liberation movements, which might have been an effective means of self-destruction.

We have realised that the way in which Botswana handled issues of the Namibian liberation struggle was not only responsible but indeed served the Namibian liberation struggle in many respects. One can therefore confidently conclude that the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana played their role in the Namibian liberation struggle. They did not occupy the centre stage but, by remaining in the background, allowed the protectorate and Botswana to often turn a blind eye on the activities of the Namibian liberation movements.

Appendix

List of Abbreviations

AACRLS	Archives of the Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle
AI	Amnesty International
ALC	African Liberation Committee
ANC	African National Congress
BAB	Basler Afrika Bibliographien
BCC	Botswana Christian Council
BCoC	Botswana Council of Churches
BCR	Botswana Council for Refugees
BDF	Botswana Defence Force
BDP	Botswana Democratic Party
BIP	Botswana Independence Party
BNF	Botswana National Front
BOSS	Bureau of State Security
BPP	Bechuanaland/Botswana People's Party
BSAC	British South Africa Company
CANU	Caprivi African National Union
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
FNLA	Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola – National Front for the Liberation of Angola
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique – Liberation Front of Mozambique
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IRCOZ	International Refugee Council of Zambia
LEGCO	Legislative Council
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola – Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NACIP	Namib Convention Independence Party
NP	National Party
NUDO	National Unity Democratic Organization
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OPC	Ovamboland People's Congress
OPO	Ovamboland People's Organization
PAC	Pan African Congress
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
RDP	Rally for Democracy and Progress
RENAMO	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana
RF	Rhodesian Front
RIP	Rural Industries Promotion

SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCC	Southern African Development Coordination Conference
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAP	South African Party
SWANLA	South West Africa Native Labour Association
SWANLIF	South West African National Liberation Front
SWANU	South West Africa National Union
SWAPA	South West African Progressive Association
SWAPO	South West African People's Organization
SWATF	South West African Territorial Force
SWASB	South West African Students Body
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIIP	United Namib Independence People's Party
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola – National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UNIP	United National Independence Party
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
UPA	União dos Povos de Angola – Union of the Peoples of Angola
WENELA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
ZANU(-PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union (-Patriotic Front)
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

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The role played by Botswana in various southern African liberation struggles has previously been neglected in historical studies. The country's politics of support and mobilisation early on in Namibia's struggle for independence from South Africa proved crucial for the formative period of both nation states. Botswana's difficult and contradictory position as neighbour of the South African apartheid state and colonial power in Namibia are carefully dealt with, as are the challenges faced by the fragile Namibian refugee networks and liberation movements, SWANU and SWAPO, operating in Botswana for decades.

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